

Painting a Portrait:
Early Learning Assessment Practices

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*I dedicate this thesis to my children, Robyn Parsons and Ryan Rioux, and my parents,
David and Alvena Goodine.*



“Strength, Stability, Loyalty” by Robyn Parsons

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Abstract

This mixed-methods, qualitative study provided a snapshot of how Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) and early learning programs attend to the assessment of young children. While ECEs primarily use observation to assess children's development and learning, specific assessment tools, which monitor and provide summative results, are implemented amid concerns that standardized measures are not appropriate for young children.

The program administrator of an early years program, designated as an Early Years Centre (EYC) by the province of Prince Edward Island, and three ECE staff working with pre-school aged children, were purposely selected to participate in the study. Findings were obtained from a mix of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, ECE journal entries, and one focus group. Additionally, an online questionnaire was sent to 64 program administrators across the province and had a 36% return rate.

Study results highlighted the complexities, tensions, and opportunities in creating rich portraits of children's learning and development. This study provides a context to move forward within the ECE system and shows a need to: (a) address the training and educational needs of ECEs; (b) support the leadership development of program administrators; and (c) conduct further research to enable the opportunity for integrating formative and summative assessment monitoring processes among stakeholders (early childhood, education, public health, and social service).

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Chapter One: Introduction

Canadian childcare advocates, government policy makers, researchers, and early childhood educators have been heavily influenced by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2003) thematic review. This review of early childhood education and care policy in 21 countries from 1998 to 2004, served to foster greater investment in, and exploration of, early childhood development in Canada. This review included a focus on early childhood education and care policy and programs across Canada through site visits to Prince Edward Island, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. Canada was commended for promising federal parental leave policies and for the family policy practices in Quebec. However, several areas were identified for greater attention and financial investment prompting Canadian policymakers to address the purpose and capacity of childcare programs rather than limit the services to labour market supports. The following OECD statement brought significant attention to the Canadian early learning and childcare sector and need for a systematic approach:

The result is a patchwork of uneconomic, fragmented services, within which a small “child care” sector is seen as labour market support, often without focused child development and education role ... other OECD countries have been progressing toward publicly managed, universal services focused on the development of young children. (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003, p. 6)

The OECD thematic review findings and statements challenged the principles and practices of Canadian early childhood policy initiatives compared to other OCED

countries and served as a catalyst that garnered greater attention in the development of policy, resources, and funding initiatives leading to increased investments in the promotion and development of the child development and education role in early learning programs.

The OECD thematic review also raised international awareness with regards to five curriculum approaches: (a) Experiential Education in Finland; (b) High/Scope® Curriculum from the United States; (c) Reggio Emilia schools, Italy; (d) the *Te Whāriki* curriculum from New Zealand; and (e) the Swedish curriculum. Internationally, and especially within Canada, the thematic review and curriculum approaches opened dialogue and exploration in the area of curricula and pedagogies appropriate for young children (Early Childhood Education, 2004). In recent years (2006–2008) the development of curriculum frameworks for early learning and childcare has occurred in five provinces: New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. Prior to these frameworks in 1997, Quebec was the only province to have a formal early learning curriculum, which drew upon the American High Scope curriculum approach and was updated in 2007 (Langford, 2010). Quebec's system of early learning and childcare is unique in Canada as this is the only province to have developed within its provincial jurisdiction an accessible early learning and childcare for all young children with a nominal daily fee paid by parents.

The influence of the OECD thematic review on Canadian jurisdictions includes Prince Edward Island (PEI). In 2010, PEI launched its own policy framework, *Securing the Future for our Children: Preschool Excellence Initiative*, referred to as the PEI-PEI. The PEI-PEI established the infrastructure support to re-position the delivery of early

learning and childcare programs within a system rather than through a sectorial approach. Among several initiatives within the PEI-PEI was the development of a curriculum framework for implementation by Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) in early learning and childcare programs. In the spring and summer of 2010, early learning centres interested in becoming an Early Years Centre (EYC) under the new PEI-PEI guidelines, were invited to apply resulting in the acceptance of 44 programs across the province. The provincial government defined EYCs as programs where parent fees were regulated, all staff were trained and certified, and educators received better pay through significant investments from government (Prince Edward Island Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010). The early year's curriculum framework was implemented within licensed early learning programs designated as EYCs. In the fall of 2011, all staff working within the designated EYCs in Prince Edward Island were required to attend mandatory training for the early years curriculum framework.

The attention and development of early childhood curriculum in Canada (Beach, 2010; Langdon, 2008; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003) not only provides a basis for building early childhood programs, it also heightens the importance of assessment in these early childhood programs. This interest in the assessment of young children poses many implications for early childhood educators (ECEs). ECE personnel in licensed early learning and childcare programs have daily opportunities to collect, analyze, and synthesize observational information as part of the assessment of the children under their care and guidance. Assessment practices and methods are promoted as a means to inform early childhood educators in determining children's developmental level, play interests, challenges, and successes during different

aspects of the day and through interactions with other children. In addition, assessment supports the ECE to plan curriculum activities, communicate with parents, and evaluate programs' effectiveness (*Early Childhood Curriculum*, 2009).

On a national level, the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* (OSECE) (Child Care Human Resource Sector Council, 2010), a revision to the *Occupational Standards for Child Care Practitioners* (2003), articulated the role and scope of practice for early childhood educators. The OSECEs are intended to guide early childhood educators in their role to support, guide, and nurture children's learning and development and articulate for others the scope of practice within the ECE role. Observational practices, methods of documentation, and the significance of interpretation are described in greater detail than in the previous version of the standards. The OSECE stated, "Early childhood educators facilitate daily experiences that support and promote each child's physical, language, emotional, cognitive, social and creative development, and behaviour using applicable observation tools while respecting inclusion principles and diversity issues" (Child Care Human Resource Sector Council, p. 11).

The *Occupational Standards* (Child Care Human Resource Sector Council, 2010) require ECEs to demonstrate their use of a variety of observation and documentation techniques by: (a) documenting observations using a variety of methods (e.g., notes, photos, videos, etc.); (b) seeking information from parents' observation of their children; (c) categorizing observations into developmental domains; (d) interpret observations; (e) communicating observations with team and families; and (f) using non-biased language (e.g., open-ended sentences, non-judgmental terminology, etc.). The required core knowledge ECEs must know are child development theories, effective communication

skills to understand and interpret children's behaviours, and effective approaches with regard to observation and documentation techniques (p. 11).

In light of changes to the OSECEs nationally and the changing landscape of early learning and care programs in Prince Edward Island, ECEs are facing many transitions that may serve to transform and/or reaffirm pedagogical practices supported through observational assessment. As ECEs and program administrators within early learning programs designated as early years centres in the province of Prince Edward Island move through the transitions, implementing new standards, curriculum frameworks, and accountability processes, an examination of assessment practices is timely. The rationale for when, why, and how assessment is conducted and issues faced in collecting assessment information was examined through an *on the ground* case study exploration of assessment practices with a preschool ECE team and online questionnaire administered to program administrators across the province. *The purpose of the study was to explore the current assessment practices of ECEs and the assessment practices found within early learning programs of young children's learning and development.* Two key considerations were the role of traditional naturalistic observation approaches for child assessment and balancing the care and education aspects of assessment in this new era of practice and accountability. To explore these issues the following research questions were identified:

- 1) What is the perceived role of child assessment in the programs offered in an Early Years Centre?
- 2) To what extent do early learning programs attend to the assessment of young children's learning and development?

- 3) To what extent do early childhood educators attend to the assessment of young children's learning and development?

Assessment of Young Children

The purposes for assessment, intentions of assessment, and methods of assessment are of ethical concern to the wellbeing and best interests of young children as pointed out in the following quote:

The early childhood field has garnered attention with initiatives to foster skill acquisition in young children prior to kindergarten entry. These initiatives, in conjunction with the rigorous demands of curricular reform and a burgeoning accountability movement, invoke questions regarding the adequacy of the instruments used to assess young children and the inherent difficulties in conducting such assessments. (Bordignon & Lam, 2004, p. 737)

In the United States, there has been a movement away from observation assessment practices within the naturalistic environment of children toward standardized testing practices. The use of standardized testing with young children is of concern and the basis of much debate as governments seek to maximize financial investments and address accountability (Miller & Almon, 2009; Pianta, Cox, & Snow, 2007). The influence and development of summative measures to monitor children's development is underway in Canada through such work as Sloat, Beswick, and Willms' (2007) development of the Early Years Evaluation (EYE) tools. Although Sloat et al. (2007) indicated they were aware of ideological and pedagogical arguments against the use of standardized assessments with young children, the EYE tools are standardized measures currently being implemented in Prince Edward Island.

ECEs have traditionally utilized holistic observation during play activities and daily interactions throughout the routine to document young children's behaviours and determine modification of classroom practices and curriculum activities. Their knowledge of child development, learning styles, and temperament have informed decisions to support development across all domains (Armstrong, 2006; Bodrova & Leong, 2007, 2010; Dunphy, 2010; Follari, 2011; Gestwicki, 2007; Occupational Standards, 2010). Bordignon and Lam (2004) asserted, "Our aim should be to design an assessment process that is reflective of current learning theories and the vast range of early childhood development for our multicultural population base" (p. 746). McAfee and Leong (2011) identified a range of assessment practices such as: informal, performance, authentic, formative, summative, and curriculum-based or curriculum-embedded that are employed and constitute assessment vocabulary.

Child assessment is a vital and growing component of high-quality early childhood programs. Not only is it an important tool in understanding and supporting young children's development, it is essential to document and evaluate program effectiveness. For assessment to be widely used though it must employ methods that are feasible, sustainable, and reasonable with regards to demands on budgets, educators, and children. (Epstein, Schweinhart, DeBruin-Parecki, & Robin, 2004, p. 1)

Evaluation and assessment responsibilities that are part of daily activities and interactions support efficient and effective use of resources to maximize time, energy, and resources and serve to provide a consistent and accurate record of children's developmental capabilities and learning dispositions. ECEs spend a considerable period

of time with children in the active parts of their day. During this time, a considerable amount of observational data can be collected. Many factors influence the collection and analysis of observational data including the structure of the daily routine, selection of activities, use of spaces, and culture of the team work. The emphasis on evaluating the environment to determine the quality of the care and educational experiences of the children has uncovered several contextual elements that influence the type of assessments and content knowledge of assessments.

Evaluation of Environments and the Quality Debate

The quality of early learning and childcare programs has been researched extensively, and it is now a common assumption that high-quality childcare and education enhance children's development (Mitchell, Wylie, & Carr, 2008). Mitchell et al. reviewed 117 studies world-wide identifying the characteristics of high-quality early childhood education as having a strong influence on children's cognitive development, learning dispositions, and health and benefit children across the socioeconomic range. The dimensions of quality that Mitchell et al. identified as particularly important for child development outcomes are: (a) the quality of staff-child interactions; (b) the learning resources available; (c) programs that engage children; and (d) a supportive environment for children to work together. The link between classroom quality and developmental outcomes has been established in numerous studies and quality enhancement initiatives (Mitchell et al., 2008; Sheridan, 2007; Sylva, Taggart, Sirja-Blatchford, Totsika, Ereky-Stevens, Gilden, & Bell, 2007). The pedagogical practices of ECEs to "achieve a balance between the opportunities provided for children to benefit from teacher-initiated group work, and in the provision of freely chosen yet potentially instructive play activities"

(Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004, p. 713) using scaffolding and sustained thinking teaching strategies were evident in high quality programs. Sheridan (2007) provided further elaboration of the ECE's role in quality learning and care of young children through "a model of competence development" (p. 201). In this model, the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale* first edition by Harms and Clifford (1998) was used as a foundation for planning and development based on an awareness of good quality and the pedagogical processes to support quality. The competence development program was used to raise awareness "of changes in and requirements of society, modern theories of how children learn, and the importance of their own roles as teachers in this process" (Sheridan, 2007, p. 201). Sheridan asserted, "quality could be enhanced providing the competence development program challenged the teachers to change their pedagogical ways of thinking and understanding" (p. 201). The competence development program Sheridan referred to appears similar to the onsite consultation model Palsha and Wesley (1998) developed to assist early childhood settings to increase quality in order to support the inclusion of children with special needs using the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised Edition* (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2005) to improve overall program quality through assessment of the environment. The onsite consultation model has been used in Prince Edward Island through the *Measuring and Improving Kids Environments* (MIKE) program and the *Bridges program* in which kindergarten and early learning programs voluntarily participated in the evaluation of environments and development of action plans to address global program quality.

The evaluation of environments to address overall quality and the inclusion of children with exceptional needs opened dialogue providing avenues to discuss the

dimensions of quality in spaces and standards of practice beyond provincial childcare regulations. The dialogue and exploration through action plans supported changes to the structure of the daily routine, design, and set-up of indoor and outdoor play/learning spaces, encouraged teamwork among ECEs, and provided accessible play materials and areas for exploration to the children. The evaluation of environments and movement to increase overall quality lends naturally toward a close examination and dialogue on pedagogy and assessment practices employed with young children in PEI early learning programs. The method, type, and frequency of assessment utilized within early learning programs serve to inform and reflect the contribution of early learning experiences on children's development and learning. However, the methods of assessment practices are also influenced by theoretical influences as is most apparent in the quality debate.

Theoretical Framework

The movement toward emergent curriculum approaches and development of early learning curriculum frameworks focuses attention on the sociocultural theories associated with the constructivist theoretical framework. "With the discourse of meaning-making, alternative pedagogies emerge-pedagogies that allow children and educators to co-construct knowledge and to resist dominant understandings that have become normalized (Paccini-Ketchabaw & Pence, 2011, p.5). As curriculum frameworks and assessment practices are developed to foster the learning and development needs of young children, ECEs' perspectives on the methods and types of assessment practices must be considered. As curriculum framework initiatives for young children move toward *meaning-making* rather than *enculturation of dominant understandings*, the emphasis on socio-cultural pedagogy is evident, and, subsequently, the type of assessment processes

and procedures to consider is of significance for ECEs, program supervisors in early learning and childcare programs, curriculum developers, training institutions, and policymakers. The movement toward *meaning making* and making learning visible in co-construction between children and adults (ECE and parents) holds professional development implications for ECEs and influential considerations in the design and analysis of assessment information.

The evolution of early childhood development curriculum and pedagogy has been identified as the most holistic and least differentiated approach as children explore and learn through play activities. Substantial research supports the importance of children's learning through play (Armstrong, 2006; Miller & Almon, 2009; Yelland, Libby, O'Rourke, & Harrison, 2008) and reinforces an understanding that healthy child development is fostered in settings that: (a) provide warm human relationships; (b) provide opportunities for imaginative and playful learning; (c) allow children to choose their activities; and (d) include teachers who will help them build on their experiences (Armstrong, 2006; Miller & Almon, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2008; Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). Mitchell et al. (2008) reported "There is evidence that a curriculum where children can investigate and think for themselves is associated with better cognitive performance in later schooling than one that is academically oriented" (p. 42).

The advent of curriculum for children in the early years has brought to the forefront the assessment of young children's learning and development with multiple perspectives on what and how to measure. Feldman (2010) affirmed the importance of building on the observational skills of ECEs in the development of assessment tools to align standards, curriculum, and assessment. Bordignon and Lam (2004) asserted, "Our

aim should be to design an assessment process that is reflective of current learning theories and the vast range of early childhood development for our multicultural population base (p. 746). Subsequently, there is a need to develop ECEs' assessment skills to align standards, curriculum, and assessment (Feldman, 2010)

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2009) position statement on early childhood curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation defined expectations for ECE assessment practices and has had international influence. The NAEYC position statement defined the criteria in which to conduct “sound assessment that is developmentally appropriate for children from birth through primary grades” (p. 22).

Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8 (DAP), a resource to guide instruction published by the NAEYC, has guided the curriculum planning that most early childhood educators learn within college and university programs. DAP is a philosophical framework that guides educators in developing curriculum activities that reflect what is known about the group of children, “the sequences in which children acquire specific concepts, skills, and abilities, building on prior experiences” (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009, p. 20). Wein (1995), in her study of the use of DAP practices by ECE teachers, discussed the tensions and contradictions that ECE personnel experienced in action between the use of teacher directed (teacher domain) scripts and enacting developmentally appropriate practice. As many ECEs in Canada work to implement developmentally appropriate practices, others within Canada and worldwide are exploring other pedagogical perspectives such as those emulated in the curriculum

frameworks of the Swedish curriculum, Reggio Emilia approach and the *Te Whāriki* curriculum. The Reggio Emilia community through their pedagogical approach has illuminated the concept of the *rich* child, as a co-constructor of knowledge, rather than the child as an *empty vessel* to be filled with knowledge. Dahlberg et al. (1999) asserted from a postmodern perspective the view of child as citizen:

Children are both part of, but also separate from, the family, with their own interests that may not always coincide with those of parents and other adults.

Children have a recognized and independent place in society, with their own rights as individual human beings and full members of society....Childhood is understood not as preparatory or marginal stage, but as a component of the structure of society— a social institution— and important in its own right as one stage of the life course, no more not less important than other stages. (p.49)

Current research refers to developmentally appropriate practice from the past and is positioning or layering cross-cultural and postmodern views and/or social theories of learning grounded in critical and feminist scholarship as the theoretical framework (Nason & Whitty, 2007; Yelland, Libby, O'Rourke, & Harrison, 2009). Wein (1995) encouraged development of spaces, time, and supports to provide ECEs with opportunity to reflect, dialogue, and determine their script. The formal development of early childhood curriculum and exploration of theoretical foundations of the Reggio Emilia approach, *Te Whāriki* and the Swedish curriculum frameworks for early learning and child care encourages examination of emergent curriculum (varying degrees of child directed, child centred, child initiated), views of childhood and socio-cultural influences. The emphasis on socio-cultural pedagogical influences is evident, and, subsequently, the

type of assessment processes and procedures to consider is of significance for ECEs, Program Supervisors in early learning and childcare programs, curriculum developers, training institutions, and policymakers. This study explored ECEs' awareness and opened dialogue in the application of sociocultural pedagogical practices through case study activities with a preschool early learning team.

Researcher's Professional Background

During a 10-year period (2000–2010), early childhood and community-based kindergarten programs in Prince Edward Island voluntarily participated in quality enhancement programs called the *Bridges Programme* and *Measuring and Improving Kids Environments (MIKE) Programme*. Professional development and resource support to increase program capacity for assessment of quality and inclusion practices were delivered by early childhood coaches, a role I held for 10 years in the Bridges and MIKE programs. The Bridges program was delivered in a partnership between the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) of Prince Edward Island. The MIKE program was a partnership between Department of Social Services and Seniors and ECDA of PEI.

In my work with programs as an early childhood coach, in collaboration with program administrators/supervisors, I conducted numerous observations using the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised Edition* (ECERS-R) scale (Harms et al., 2005) and *SpeciaLink Early Childhood Inclusion Quality* (SLECIQ) scale (Hope-Irwin, 2009) to assess quality aspects of the environment, interactions, developmentally appropriate and inclusion practices, and review policies. These tools serve as a self-evaluation resource, which ECEs can utilize to inform changes and expand the

environment to support curriculum activities. Through consultation and coaching interactions with program administrators/supervisors and ECEs participating in the observation, I established many collaborative professional relationships. In my work with programs striving to deliver high quality programs for young children, key dimensions of action research existed through which we explored together how current practices reflected best practice research. Collaborative professional relationships formed the basis for embarking into transformational activities together to institute change and growth.

I was also one of two provincial representatives on the *Quality By Design* research study. *Quality By Design* was an exploratory project of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit, University of Toronto, funded by Social Development Canada (2004–2007). It has stimulated dialogue about quality early learning and child care in Canada, focusing primarily on the policy or system level rather than at the level of individual programs. Site visits were conducted in PEI, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Ontario. This project followed the thematic review of Canada's Early Learning and Child Care conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Rigorous preparation was required prior to each site visit that included literature reviews as well as gaining an understanding of policy and systems in each provincial site. Each site visited had a particular focus or topic of inquiry and exploration and rigorous discussion among committee members. The site visits included touring selected early learning and child care sites and dialogue and discussion with policy and decision makers in each jurisdiction. The project leaders were able to produce a number of publications for dissemination at the conclusion of the site visits. Participation in this study expanded

my understanding of the complexity of quality and movement toward emergent curriculum approaches in the care and education of young children.

As an early childhood coach, I had explored with several programs the principles and practices of emergent curriculum. From an emergent curriculum perspective the children's interests, curiosities, understandings, misunderstandings, fears, and worries serve as a means for ECEs to facilitate explorations through playful, inquiry based activities. In an emergent curriculum approach, the sociocultural dimension is made visible leading to a range of assessment methods using digital and audio media. I was intrigued with the use of the *learning story approach* (Carr, 2001) as a means of assessing and documenting children's learning and development. I was introduced to the learning story approach through professional interactions with the University of New Brunswick team who had authored the *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Childcare* (2008). I was also familiar with several developmental checklists, the exploration of portfolios to document children's progress and the use of documentation panels in *project approach* (Katz & Chard, 2000) as methods of assessment used by programs I supported in my work as an early childhood coach. Although I was viewed as an authority in the area of early childhood education, my origin and motivation for this inquiry into assessment processes was first and foremost as an early childhood educator. As a result, it was imperative that the program owner, program administrator, and ECEs understood that I was interested and invested in documenting our collective narratives of early child assessment practices utilized within their program.

Merging of Early Childhood and Public Education

The enhanced focus on children's learning is also changing the landscape of early childhood education and has created a synergy toward greater collaboration within the public education realm (Friendly, 2010; Kaga, Bennett & Moss, 2010; Moss, 2006). The education of young children and transitions toward increased collaboration and integration of early childhood education within the realm of public education creates a context to revise and/or develop policy and standards as the two systems merge and develop an educational continuum from infancy to postsecondary schooling. The development of curriculum frameworks for early learning, an increased emphasis and reorganization of early childhood services into education departments or ministries within provincial government policy, and increased educational standards for early childhood educators within Prince Edward Island have created a potentially rich research environment.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) in Prince Edward Island has supported the adoption of an integrated play-based curriculum delivery model¹ implemented in 2008 that identified a variety of assessment practices. Just as importantly, the DEECD has also asserted its intention to maintain the play-based curriculum with the transition of kindergarten into the public school system as of

¹ A curriculum that is integrated and supports a play-based, developmentally appropriate approach. Educators will continue to follow the lead of the child in their programming and planning, using the outcomes to guide them, recognizing that all children enter kindergarten at different stages of development. (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, ND)

September 2010 (Mella, 2009). Additionally, in the spring of 2010, the DEECD implemented the *Early Years Evaluation* (EYE), a universal assessment tool to assess four-year-old children's early development prior to beginning kindergarten. The EYE evaluation assesses development in four domains: self-awareness, cognitive skills, language and communication, and gross and fine motor skills (Early Years Evaluation, ND). The *Early Years Evaluation Direct Assessment* (EYE-DA) is administered to all children before they enter kindergarten as a universal screen for possible academic or developmental delays. It takes about 30 minutes per student and is carried out in early spring by trained administrators from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Results of the EYE-DA are shared with the child's parent before they enter kindergarten (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, ND).

Additionally, in June 2011, PEI Public Health Nursing moved from screening children's development through clinical visits by public health nurses to providing parents with the *Ages and Stages Questionnaire* (ASQ) to assess their child's development and screen for delays. Questionnaire results are discussed between the parent and public health nurse through a scheduled child health clinic visit and appropriate strategies, supports, or referrals conducted.

As five-year-old children and early childhood educators teaching at the kindergarten level transition into the public school system, educators are also increasing their educational credentials through the "Bachelor of Education with an Early Years Concentration by 2016" (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, ND).

The Prince Edward Island Government provided a 63% funding increase to the early learning and childcare system in the 2009–2010 fiscal year through the *Securing the Future for our Children: Preschool Excellence Initiative* (PEI-PEI). This initiative included the: (a) development of an early years (0-4) learning framework curriculum, based on a social pedagogical approach, (b) development of designated early years centres, and (c) mandatory training of a minimum of thirty hours/three courses delivered by College Acadie and Holland College through an online blended program that commenced in the fall of 2010 (Beach, 2010; Flanagan, 2010). In PEI the health, education, and early childhood sectors are moving forward with initiatives to screen, measure and record the children's development and learning needs. ECE personnel within early learning programs have the capacity to contribute to assessment processes and document through authentic or progressive assessment processes significant child growth, development, and learning dispositions. Have these initiatives given support to ECEs in assessment? Have they addressed the role of ECEs in conducting and gathering assessment information? This study explored the role and relationship between the frontline ECEs and summative assessment practices underway in PEI.

In conducting a mix method qualitative exploratory case study of one early year centre and through the administration of an on-line questionnaire to provincial program supervisors in the province of Prince Edward Island, data results revealed elements of the attitudes, beliefs, successes and challenges associated with effectively compiling, collecting, analysing, and sharing observational and assessment data. The study identified aspects of early childhood educators' assessment practices, opportunities to explore current theoretical themes, and supports needed to enhance authentic child assessment

practices.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In chapter one the rationale for the Painting a Portrait: Early Learning Assessment Practices study was presented based on the premise that early childhood educators (ECEs) are in a unique position through the collection, interpretation, and documentation of observational data to provide assessment of children's learning and development. The movement toward curriculum frameworks for early learning and care programs rooted in sociocultural theoretical frameworks poses new directions in understanding the assessment practices appropriate with young children. The study identifies current assessment practices and addresses the following questions:

- 1) What is the perceived role of child assessment in the programs offered in an Early Years Centre?
- 2) To what extent do early learning programs attend to the assessment of young children's learning and development?
- 3) To what extent do early childhood educators attend to the assessment of young children's learning and development?

In order to ground the research and inform the methods and procedures, these areas were reviewed: (a) the emergent, constructivist paradigm in deepening understanding of socio-cultural cognitive development theories, (b) the summative assessments and formative monitoring systems that have evolved, (c) the role and scope of authentic and, formative assessments and their importance in the assessment of young children, and (d) an exploration of promising formative assessment methods.

The Emergent, Constructivist Paradigm

The capacity and capability of young children to learn more complex language, concepts, and skills in addition to the proven benefits of high quality early learning experiences (Mitchell et.al, 2008; Sylva et. al, 2007) has created a context for assessment as well as giving rise to tensions about assessment methods appropriate and effective for young children (Bodrova, Leong, & Shore, 2004; Bordinon & Lam, 2004; Carr, 2001; Grisham-Brown, Hallam, & Brookshire, 2006; Shepard, 2000; Sloat, Beswick, & Willms, 2007). It would seem the contemporary era is driven by ideals for ensuring the potential of all children and nurturing 21st century learners, entangled with societal pressures to balance accountability and sustainability (Bordinon & Lam, 2004; Dunphy, 2010; Epstien et al., 2004; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). The skills identified for successful learning or to create life-long learners have elicited a discourse about the core skills and dispositions to be fostered and nurtured in the early years that will lead children to later success with formal schooling and citizenry. To transform assessment practices, Shepard (2000) posited “The key tenets of social efficiency curricula, behaviorist learning theories, and scientific measurement” (p. 4) as characterizing the dominant 20th century paradigm in assessment and identifies the movement in the 21st century toward an emergent, constructivist paradigm.

As the emergent, constructivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Shepard, 2000) has evolved, so has the understanding that development and learning are influenced by the types of social experiences children have within their family and community environments (McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007). The constructivist paradigm has also generated exploration of greater depths in understanding sociocultural

cognitive development theories (Carr, 2001; Mitchell et al., 2008; Sheridan, 2007; Sirja-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004; Yelland, Libby, O'Rourke, & Harrison, 2008). The capacity and capability of young children to learn and the means to foster and nurture this learning and developmental growth has led to the exploration and development of a variety of tools to assess and monitor children.

Summative Assessment and Formative Monitoring Systems

The development of summative assessment and monitoring systems has become a trend in the assessment of young children's learning and development to identify policy, resource allocation, and program development for ensuring children's readiness to learn upon entry to the public school system (Bordignon & Lam, 2004; Meisels, 2004; Willms, 2009). In the United States, Meisels (2004) raised concern that the National Reporting System (NRS) standardized test administered only to English and Spanish speaking children attending *Head Start* programs "is a passive reception of pouring into a vessel knowledge and skills that are needed for competence rather than recognizing learning as active and teaching as a joint process of interaction between child and adult" (p. 1401). Meisels (2004) further cautioned that outcome assessments must be based on research and best practice for young children, taking into account the context in which children live and grow otherwise harm is caused.

In Canada, Guhn, Janus, and Hertzman (2007) stated "School readiness is increasingly defined as a holistic construct, encompassing not solely cognitive facets, but also physical, social, emotional, and communicative ones" (p. 370). Janus (2007) asserted the importance of monitoring children's outcomes during their early years and supporting Offord's tireless advocacy to ensure that initiatives for young children "must do more

good than harm, and programs for children must be available and accessible, especially to those who need them most” (p. 1). The *Early Development Instrument* (EDI) developed at the Offord Centre of Child Studies at McMaster University by Janus and Offord (2000) was designed as a holistic measurement construct for groups of kindergarten age children. The EDI focuses on domains of: (a) physical health and wellbeing; (b) social competence; (c) emotional maturity, language, and cognition; (d) communication skills; and (e) general knowledge (Janus, 2007). The EDI is not administered for individual diagnostic purposes, but for the assessment of an entire class, school, community, or school district. The EDI assessment is completed by the kindergarten teacher in the second half of the kindergarten year to provide a snapshot of children’s readiness for Grade 1. Aggregate results are used by schools, school districts, and communities to plan initiatives to address the vulnerable domain areas identified through community development approaches. EDI has been used within Canada and on an international level to support policy and program development initiatives by governments and communities (Janus, 2007). Sloat, Beswick, and Willms (2007) have developed the *Early Years Evaluation—Direct Assessment* (EYE-DA) and the *Early Years Evaluation—Teacher Assessment* (EYE-TA) for early identification of reading difficulties young children may experience prior to or during kindergarten as a means to inform intervention and instructional practices within the classroom setting and engage parents in communication in relation to the child’s learning and development needs. Sloat et al., (2007) stated that in the development of the EYE early literacy monitoring system “all partners were cognizant of the ideological and pedagogical arguments against the use of standardized assessments with young children, and they fundamentally agreed the monitoring system

should not interfere with pedagogy” (p. 525) and thus developed a formative monitoring system. Through this formative monitoring system, they asserted a balanced approach in which instruction on early literacy development considers direct instruction and fundamentals skilfully integrated into holistic activities. The items assessed on the EYE-TA focus on specific skills and knowledge to ensure greater objectivity by teachers as previous research had identified that teachers were influenced by factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, and behaviour (Sloat et al., 2007). Although the EYE—DA, EYE—TA, and EDI tools strive to reflect the holistic aspect of children’s development and learning in their early years, the constructs are focused on identifying and measuring children’s deficits so that interventions and remediation can occur.

It would seem that within Canada, policymakers are striving to balance a society’s need to identify the learning and development delays of young children and monitor the development and learning demographics in order to make informed decisions about policy, resource allocation, and interventions. The role and scope of parents and ECEs to contribute to the assessment information based on observations of children’s capabilities and knowledgeable relationships that reflect understanding of temperament and learning styles, dispositions, or preferences is not reflected in summative and formative monitoring systems. Additionally, the growing cultural diversity of early learning programs and communities creates a context to open dialogue on the best means to measure the learning and development of young children when English or French are not the first language. The complexity of human development within the context of sociocultural experiences supports dialogue for the role of qualitative data in the assessment of children’s learning and development.

Authentic and Formative Assessment Continuum

The evolution toward an emergent, constructivist paradigm appears to have influenced an understanding that the development of young children is dynamic and influenced by both maturational and environmental factors most especially social and cultural ones. A review of the literature on assessment of young children and current publications presents a continuum of assessment methods referred to as either authentic or formative. Dunphy (2010) spoke to the emergence of ecological, sociocultural, and activity theory perspectives which all “emphasize the socially constructed nature of learning and of assessment (p. 43). Sirja-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) asserted “The adult (ECE) must understand the cognitive, cultural and social perspective of the learner so that they can ‘build bridges’ between what the child knows and what she/he is capable of knowing” (p. 725). Bordignon and Lam (2004) asserted that the diverse aspects of readiness for learning and development of young children preclude a comprehensive picture of the child emerging from a single evaluation based on a solitary instrument. Further they stated:

To provide a comprehensive portrait of the child’s functioning, information should be gathered from multiple sources. A child’s capacity to learn is influenced by innate ability, physical development, environmental stimulation and school programming (personnel, curricular structure and the availability of resources). (p. 741)

Bagnato (2007) proposed a conceptual model for authentic assessment of children at risk and in need of early intervention services that captures what a child is capable and able to demonstrate informed through multiple perspectives (interdisciplinary/team members,

parents and ECE) with the assessment conducted over time within naturalistic environments/activities. Functional objectives are measured with common, sensitive, jargon free, and universal instruments to measure developmental progress and functional abilities. Bagnato's (2007) emphasis on the importance of collaboration and involvement of parents, ECEs, and any other significant adults in the authentic assessment appears to balance the results of the universal assessment tool within the contextual factors of cultural and social experiences. Bagnato (2007) promotes authentic assessment practices with young children "to create a 'map' or alignment among children's competencies, appropriate interventions, and everyday activities, routines and settings" (p. 110). He pointed out that most authentic assessment tools for either curriculum-based or play-based scales "organize competencies by developmental domains rather than the daily routine activities" the child experiences, thus hindering the "natural process of observation for many people" (p. 110).

Meisels, Xiaoli, and Beachy-Quick (2010) asserted that the *Ounce Scale*, (a dynamic authentic observational assessment of infants' and toddlers' development from birth through 42 months of age), "showed moderate reliability in predicting which children were at -risk or not at-risk" (p. 55). The *Ounce Scale* is comprised of three elements that are highly sensitive to context: observational records, family albums, and developmental profiles and standards" (p. 57). The *Ounce Scale* was designed to accomplish several purposes. First this model provided a structure for families and professionals to become better observers of children. It provides a means to document and directly evaluate child growth and development. The *Ounce Scale* also enhanced child development by increasing family engagement in young children's growth and

learning, and it strengthened relationships between infants and toddlers and their parents and others who care for them by helping the parents and caregivers better understand how to support children's development (Meisels et. al., 2010, p. 57). Interestingly, one of the challenges identified with reliability of the findings was ECEs did not make appropriate use of *needs development* rating categories resulting in researchers using a *not yet* category. The study findings identify that the program's philosophy and strength-based approach may have led ECEs to view the indicator more negatively than the authors of the *Ounce Scale* intended. The authors identify that "the social-emotional domains have more items than other developmental domains on the Ounce" (p. 68).

The educational levels of ECEs' training (or lack of) in child development are posed as a challenge and consideration in the development of the scale. Meisels et al. (2010) stated that the scale is intended for use by ECEs who are often not highly trained in child development and point out the importance of ongoing professional development and support for ECEs working with young children to understand "the significance of performing and understanding assessment within context"(p. 69). Another interesting professional development need as reported by Keilty, LaRocco, and Casell Bankler (2009) with regard to early intervention providers (majority 65.7% holding a master's degree) identified "the importance of transdisciplinary knowledge, working collaboratively with families and using authentic assessment strategies as primary areas for professional development" (p. 253). Research seems to indicate a shared need for training and further support to conduct authentic assessments by ECEs and other professionals holding higher postsecondary credential. Further research and development into collaborative training and mentoring support within transdisciplinary teams that

include ECEs is warranted as the emergent constructivist paradigm shift evolves and collective understanding develops in conducting authentic assessments with young children.

Grisham-Brown, Hallam, and Brookshire (2006) proposed using authentic assessment practices to document children's progress within a set of program standards and to inform curriculum planning within a play-based assessment process. The *Assessment Evaluation and Programming a System (AEPS) for Infants, Toddlers and Preschool Children* provides an inventory of skills to be assessed during play activities. The items in the AEPS are embedded into naturally occurring, daily routine and play activities (e.g., snack, playdough, manipulatives, dramatic play, story time, etc.) and a protocol developed that the ECE follows to assess children on two assessment activities each week. The authentic performance assessment processes proposed by Bagnato (2007), Grisham-Brown et al. (2006), and Meisels et al. (2010) were designed to fall within the criterion-referenced family of testing processes. Carr (2001) referred to these approaches as a folk model of assessment and the assumptions that accompany this approach as:

The purpose for assessment (to check against a short list of skills that describe 'competence' for the next stage of education), outcomes of interest (fragmented and context-free school-oriented skills), focus for intervention or attention (the deficits), validity of assessment data (objective observation of skills, reflected in a checklist, are best), progress (hierarchies of skill, especially in literacy and numeracy), procedures (checklists) and value (surveillance of me as a teacher). (p. 2)

The design of tools such as EYE-TA, EYE-DA, and EDI is intended to capture a summative view of a group of children identifying the perceived deficits of that group of children. This snapshot provides decision makers with quick access to information and forms the basis for allocation of resources, policy development, and research. The understanding that standardized tools are not appropriate for use with young children has led to further development of a variety of criterion-referenced testing processes that attempt to balance systematic observation, developmental checklists, and multiple perspectives. Assessment tools such as the *Ounce* attempt to balance the measurement and documentation of children's development, learning, and cultural translation of experiences toward authentic assessment methods, however, they are not easily accessible to frontline ECEs unless purchased for use by their administration.

Promising Formative Assessment Methods

In New Zealand, a different approach to assessment has been employed “towards more qualitative and interpretive methods of documentation that are able to capture the learner within contexts of relationships and environments” (Mitchell, 2008, p. viii). The early learning curriculum, *Te Whāriki* in New Zealand is a sociocultural framework promoting the assessment of learning dispositions rather than predetermined outcomes (Mitchell, 2008). Carr (2001) asserted that “a standardized achievement test or checklist method, with a set of universal standards or performance criteria, loses the action, activity or particular content that provides the link between the individual and the setting” (p.181). Carr called attention to the roles of *convergent* and *divergent* assessment processes postulating philosophical distinctions between the two. Carr referenced Torrance and Pryor's (1998) definition of *convergent* assessment as “assessment that

sums up a child's knowledge or skill from a predetermined list" whereas *divergent* assessment "emphasises the learners understanding and is jointly accomplished by the teacher and learner" (p. 2). Is the purpose of assessment to fill in the gaps of what a child does not know and/or cannot do (convergent) or to identify what a child does do and/or has capacity to do (divergent)? Carr asserted that as her assessment practices have evolved the divergence of what children are capable of has become the focus of assessment using the learning story approach.

Learning stories. Formative assessment methods employed through *learning stories* (Carr, 2001) provide children, parents, and ECEs with an action research framework that focuses on the process of learning, dispositions toward learning, and "the concept of a habitus to argue early childhood outcomes in ways that make valuable statements about[children's] learning and progress"(p. 176). The basis of observation and analysis of those observations within the framework of a learning story positions ECEs, children, and parents to construct learning and development from *credit model* and *funds of knowledge* constructs within reciprocal relationships. As well, Yelland, Libby, O'Rourke, and Harrison (2008) reported successful results with assisting ECEs to adopt sociocultural perspectives by focusing on funds of knowledge, which they describe as recognizing the rich repertoire of knowledge and experiences with which children come to school. The children's diverse background and experiences provided a springboard for learning and enable ECEs to move beyond thinking about formal learning as sets of skills and knowledge to reproduce.

Learning story construction follows the following format: describing, documenting, discussing, and deciding among the ECE team, parents, and child as the

narrative is written and interpreted (Carr, 2001). Karlsdóttir and Garðarsdóttir (2010) in their use of learning stories in an Icelandic preschool determined that for learning stories to be used as an effective assessment tool the preschool teacher (ECE) requires support in the first steps of documenting and must become open to identifying children's competencies and strengths rather than the problems. Karlsdóttir and Garðarsdóttir (2010) inferred the major challenge in using learning stories as an assessment tool is the need to gather multiple forms of data (children's drawings, photographs, and videos) and level of reflection required on the power in relationships, to effectively make children's perspectives visible. Blaiklock (2010) expressed concern with the use of learning stories as an assessment tool identifying: (a) validity or credibility of learning stories; (b) defining and measuring particular learning dispositions in the 0–5 year time span; (c) confusion about where, when, and how often learning stories are to be recorded; and (d) that they may limit planning to extend learning in different contexts. Carr (2001) addressed these concerns of validity and reliability with a process of accountability, which includes plausibility and trustability. Carr listed four major ways accountability is achieved with learning stories: “keeping the data transparent, ensuring that a range of interpreters have their say, refining the constructs as they appear locally, and being clear about the connection between the learner and the environment” (p. 183). The *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care* (2008) shared Carr's perspective drawing upon narrative and normative assessment to provide “differing perspectives and insights into children's learning and curriculum planning (p. 63).

Dynamic assessment. Bodrova and Leong (2007) asserted that dynamic assessment is another means to identify children's capabilities rather than focus only on measurement of fully developed competencies. Dynamic assessment employs Vygotsky's concepts of zone of proximal development (Bodrova & Leong, 2007) and scaffolding to support the ECE's observation of: (a) what the child can do on her/his own, (b) what the child is able to do with ECE intervention using scaffolding instructions, and (c) based on the previous steps what the child is capable of doing (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Follari, 2011). Application of Vygotskian approaches is favourably associated with effective teaching and learning strategies that support children's acquisition of language and literacy development in the context of social experiences through play activities (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Follari, 2011; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000). Follari (2011) stated "Vygotsky valued language (a mental tool) as a pivotal tool in learning, memory, and self-regulation as well as a key component of how teachers can support, prompt, and challenge children's learning (scaffolding their learning and development as they reach higher and higher levels of independence)" (p. 18). Carr (2001) also referred to Vygotsky's notion of *mediated action* in which the view of learning focuses on "the relationship between the learner and the environment, and seeks ways to define and document complex reciprocal and responsive relationships in that environment" (p. 5).

ECEs have the option of using several authentic or formative assessment tools or methods that support collection, analysis, and documentation of observational data to provide a balance for what children can do and are capable of, with what interventions and remediation may be required. ECEs have a unique role and opportunity in the assessment of children through observations conducted during children's engagement (or

lack of) in classroom activities and routines, collected and reflected over a period of time to reflect an authentic portrait.

Documentation panels. Kline (2008) championed “observation and documentation as integral to the early childhood classroom” (p. 70). Further, Kline cited Forman and Hall (2005) stating that “Ongoing observation of children engaged in a variety of experiences provides an authentic picture of the child’s developmental levels, interests, strategies for problem solving, skills and accomplishments, and personality and temperament” (p. 70). Documentation as conducted within Reggio Emilia approach is used as a means for *meaning making* and “a vital tool for the creation of a reflective and democratic pedagogical practice” (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 145.). The Reggio Emilia approach has influenced ECE practices within North America and most recently within Prince Edward Island (Baldachinno, 2011). Edwards, Gandini, and Forman (1998) stated that within the Reggio Emilia approach “documentation refers to any activity that renders a performance record with sufficient detail to help others understand the behaviour recorded” (p. 241).

Katz and Chard (2000) developed a process, *The Project Approach*, which has a three-phase framework to document the ECEs’, and children’s shared topic or inquiry. In the first phase, the ECE explores the children’s interests and prior knowledge on a topic. Phase two is devoted to building of experiences through field trips, expert visitors, and a variety of activities and material for exploration. Phase three concludes the project with final documentation and presentation of learning from activities and field visits and includes sharing with parents. The phases are recorded using documentation panels to display photographs, quotes, and artifacts produced by the children. The Project

Approach has become a popular method of inquiry and learning allowing curriculum and assessment to occur from the shared interests of the ECE and children. The documentation process provides a medium that reflects back to the children their learning, promoting shared reflection, opening dialogue, and increasing engagement between the ECE, children, and parents

Portfolios. Assessment of children's learning through a collection of children's artifacts within portfolios is a popular tool. The portfolio is a means to organize and provide evidence that depicts an authentic portrait of children's learning and development, and may serve as a formative assessment process between ECE, child, and parents (Harris, 2009; McAfee & Leong, 2011). The ECE and child decide together on samples of work to be included that reflect the child's learning process. The artifacts within a portfolio may include samples of children's work (drawings, stories, paintings, photographs of sculpture, building blocks, drama activities, journals, etc.) and the ECEs' observation reports, anecdotal notes, children's conversations, and developmental checklists (Harris, 2009; Follari, 2011). McAfee and Leong (2011) asserted that "portfolios fulfill most of the basic purposes of assessment: determining children's status and progress, informing instruction, providing information for reporting and communication, and preliminary identification of children who might benefit from special help" (p. 97).

Summary

The literature review positions the study findings of Early Learning Assessment Practices themes and findings, which will follow in chapter four. The following key themes and tensions from the literature review have contributed to heuristic perspective

about assessment practices and procedures for young children. Meisels (2004) expressed caution with the use of summative assessments to determine children's development and identified the limitations associated with representing broad sociocultural dimensions. Guhn, Janus, and Hertzman, (2007) proposed formative monitoring systems as a means to monitor and identify areas where a deeper analysis may be required and strengths can be built upon in the interests of ensuring more good than harm for all children. The use of the *Early Years Evaluation* (EYE) tools and *Ages and Stages Questionnaires* (ASQ) as a means to identify the needs and deficits of young children across Prince Edward Island warrants further investigation and dialogue to determine the role that early learning programs offer in balancing these summative monitoring processes with formative processes to enable an authentic portrait of children. Authentic and formative assessment processes are favourably promoted as a means to assess young children as they allow for reflection and documentation of inconsistent developmental patterns and support mapping of a credit mode rather than deficit approach (Bagnato, 2007; Grisham-Brown et al., 2006). Carr (2001) and Bagnato (2007) presented different viewpoints on the convergent and divergent aspects of assessment. In Bagnato's work in the area of early intervention assessment, the convergence concept may indeed need to take priority over divergent as supports and remediation interventions are identified and employed to address limitations as a result of disability and disease. In considering the concept of divergence from Carr, in relation to the purpose and intention of the learning story assessment approach, an argument is made that divergence allows for capabilities to emerge, which go unnoticed or are not documented in the use of hierarchically skill development checklists. These two viewpoints create confusion and tension for ECEs

warranting a need to support and promote reflection and dialogue on both concepts to gain insight and understanding to inform assessment choices and methods.

Dalberg et al. (1999) encouraged us “to engage in dialogue with each other, not to prove who is right, but to seek mutual understanding and recognition and to understand how and why” choices are made (p. 119). A variety of promising formative assessment tools are identified to document and reflect the authentic formative learning and development that occurs with young children. Documentation panels and projects provide: (a) a means to reflect, (b) co-construct the learning that is occurring between the ECE and children, and (c) to engage parents in discussions. Portfolios provide: a means to collect children’s artifacts, work samples, ECE narratives, and observation data, which can be a rich holistic mosaic of learning, development, and living. Carr’s work with the multimodal learning story approach has international reach and has infiltrated the Prince Edward Island early childhood sector through exposure to the learning story approach used within the *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care* (2008).

Although each of these resources (i.e., portfolios, documentation panel, projects, and learning stories) can be used as a means of assessment on its own, accessing the range of tools enables ECEs to develop assessment and reflection skills through a variety of means and use the observational data collected through daily interactions and explorations with children effectively. Bagnato and Neisworth (1999) proposed that “new directions and professional standards for early childhood assessment must reflect eight critical qualities: assessment must be useful, acceptable, authentic, collaborative, convergent, equitable, sensitive and congruent” (as cited in Bagnato, 2007, p. 4). The

early childhood community in PEI is transforming and being influenced by: (a) the development of an early learning and childcare system, (b) the focus on the education of young children, and (c) access to additional educational credentials for adults in the early childhood programs. The changing landscape and evolution of early learning programs provided a rich research opportunity to explore what assessment practices and methods were used by ECEs in their direct work with young children.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

In this chapter, I present the research methodology applied in this study. I have provided details of the research design, my role as a researcher, the participants, the data sources and collection methods. The rationale for the research design, selection of data tools, and data collection methods are presented in greater detail and selected to address the research questions from a variety of perspectives. Analysis and management of the data are also described in this chapter.

Research Design

The study used a mixed method approach (Morse & Niehaus, 2009) exploring assessment practices from both a macro and micro level by using several data collection tools: participant observation written notations, semi-structured interviews with ECEs, ECE journals, assessment artefacts, and questionnaire samples from program administrators and supervisors provincially. With the goal of exploring the assessment practices of Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) and their use of observational data of children during their care and play routines, an exploratory mixed methods case study was employed. The case study method was selected for its holistic and context sensitive nature (Patton, 2002). Additionally, as Yin and Davis (2007) stated “one strength of case study method is its ability to tolerate the real-life blurring between phenomenon and context” (p. 78). This study was a heuristic inquiry (Patton, 2002) as I was interested in understanding my own experiences along with the experiences of the ECEs and the program administrators who participated. The competing tensions and movement toward universal monitoring systems and international research in support of authentic and

formative assessment brings to the forefront the importance, scope, and pedagogies required in supporting the assessment and learning of all children.

The provincial program administrator online questionnaire provided a supplemental component to the case study data creating a qualitative to quantitative mixed method approach (Morse & Niehaus, 2009). The supplementary component offers the opportunity to quantify, on a broader scale, the findings from the questionnaire responses and triangulate (Heck, 2006) with qualitative case study findings. The questionnaire data were analysed and cross referenced with content analysis findings from the participant observations and ECE interviews (See Figure 3.1).

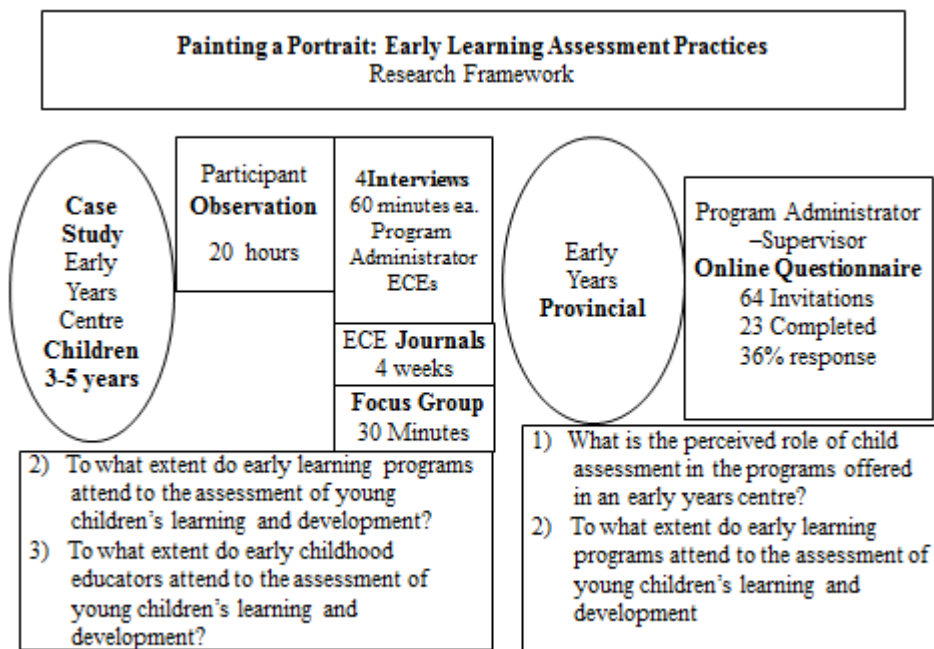


Figure 3.1. Early learning assessment practices study graphic

Data analysis of case study and questionnaire data followed a heuristic process of analysis: “immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis” (Patton, 2002, p. 486). Participant observation and semi-structured interviews provided the immersion stage, which allowed the researcher to experience, question, mediate, dialogue, and bracket knowledge and understanding of assessment practices from that of the research participants. To become further immersed in the case study, the process of transcribing observation and interview data allowed for what Patton described as *quiet contemplation* of the incubation stage to permit meaning and awareness of the data (Patton, 2002). Coding the observation, interview, and questionnaire data to identifying emerging themes and patterns allowed for the illumination phase. The questionnaire data refined emergent patterns and collective relationships with the observation and interview data enabling the explication phase. The final stage of creative synthesis “is the bringing together of the pieces that have emerged into a total experience, showing patterns and relationships” (Patton, 2002, p. 487).

Researcher’s Role

Angrosino and Mays de Pérez (2000) pointed out the value of situational identity in that ethnographers and their collaborators “do not step into fixed and fully defined positions; rather, their behaviours and expectations of each other are part of a dynamic process that continues to grow (one hopes in healthy ways, although the outcome is sometimes problematic) throughout the course of single research projects” (p. 683). In planning for the observation periods, I had intended to collect the data using the observation and assessment skills and tasks from the using the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* (2010) as a guide and format for documentation and then

move on to the interviews.

In setting the stage for the observation period of 20 hours on the first day of observations, I started by shadowing the ECE I had known for the longest period of time. The ECE expressed anxiety, that I would not see assessment practices in action. I addressed this concern by stating that although the research was being conducted to address the research questions I had developed, research also involved uncovering what is, often leading to more questions. As I was situating the assessment of young children in early learning programs in the context of observational data collected, recorded, and interpreted I encouraged her to just be herself and let the day unfold. As we moved through the morning together I collected notes on her interactions with the children, conversations with teammates, and the daily routine. After the morning session I left the site and prepared reflection notes which outlined the structure of the routine, how the children were moved through the different areas of the space in forty-five minute intervals, and the intense focus on supervision and adult lead activities this required.

The second day of observations involved shadowing the newest ECE in the team. We had no previous relationship as compared with others in the team. She confidently shared the assessment activities she was employing on her own initiative and discussed her early childhood training experience from the United Kingdom. She was new to the team and had not conducted the developmental checklist her two teammates had used to conduct parent-ECE conferences. She was using learning narratives to document activities and experiences with the children which she would file in the child's portfolio. When reviewing the portfolios and her learning narrative samples the program administrator and program owner became involved and discussions moved toward

resources that could support the documentation of observational data. The ECE also expressed interest in refining this process and finding ways to interpret children's learning and development. During the observation with the 3rd ECE she expressed dissatisfaction with the developmental checklist indicating that some areas were not developmentally appropriate for 3-4 year-old children. It was also during observation time with this ECE that a parent-ECE conference was observed and the ECE expressed her inexperience with this process.

The anxious-curious, interest each ECEs expressed through their questions, to strengthen, and interest to expand their assessment practices led to an onsite professional development learning experience. The focused attention I was able to spend with each ECE during observations created a context for dialogue and discussion which ethically I could not dismiss or ignore. In sharing resource information, learning narrative samples as assessment, and recommending resources to support collection of observations the ECE's skills and knowledge in assessment methods moved to a deeper level. The experience allowed for each ECE to grow and develop, and as a researcher, enabled me to see the limits and constraints of data collection methods. In moving into a mentoring role with the ECEs I influenced the acquisition of skills and supported the exploration of different methods. The professional learning experience that occurred between the ECE team and I, as a researcher, provided a rich snapshot of the attitudes and motivations for assessment. The professional relationship and basis as a mentor resource support made it difficult for the ECEs to see me as the researcher. This created a situation where I, as the researcher, needed to be cognizant and manage the role. The selection of a program

without a professional relationship may have changed this interaction however the research participants may not have been as transparent with their practices.

Site and Population Selection

The study was conducted in the province of PEI, Canada within the English speaking licensed early learning and childcare sector. The government of PEI's *Directory of Licensed Early Childhood Programs* was used to identify 64 licensed private and early years programs to select a program for participation in the case study and invite Program administrators to complete the online questionnaire. The email addresses listed in the directory were used to invite the program administrators or supervisors from 68 programs to complete the online questionnaire. Ten of the messages were returned undeliverable and follow-up phone calls were made to confirm if programs were still in operation and secure correct electronic addresses. Four off the addresses remained undeliverable, resulting in 64 program invitations.

Case study. An early years program within the licensed early learning childcare system, designated as Early Years Centre (EYC) by the province of Prince Edward Island was purposely selected to participate for this study. The program supervisor and three ECE staff working with the preschool aged children (i.e., ages three to five years) consented to participate in semi-structured interviews, permit participant observations of their interactions with the children, and agreed to maintain a research journal. The ECE staff also participated in a focus group to discuss interview transcripts and their experiences. Permission to use the data gathered was also obtained through written consent from the program owner who fully supported the participation of her staff (i.e., program supervisor and ECE staff) in this study (see Appendix A, Appendix B, and

Appendix C). The Program Administrator and ECEs freely choose to allow the researcher to disclose their identity. The EYC received an informational memo to post and inform parents of the study, which provided contact information for any inquiries (see Appendix D and Appendix E). Consent was granted by all parents with the exception of two parents who chose not to have photographs and artefacts of their child included.

The EYC selected for this study met the following criteria: (a) employed a full complement of ECEs with educational credentials at a diploma level; (b) served a diverse group (abilities, culture, socioeconomic) of children-infants to five years; (c) had well developed indoor and outdoor learning environments that support children's play-based learning experiences; and (d) had some parent involvement practices. Each of the criterion contributes and promotes optimal supports and resources for ECEs to have established assessment practices and reflect programs that would score in the good to excellent range on the ECERS-R scale (Harms et al., 2005) and SLECIQ scale (Hope-Irwin, 2009). The study criteria narrowed the number of EYCs from which the researcher could select. The program selected was well known to the researcher and appeared to be experiencing limited disruption as a result of ECE transition to kindergarten in the public education system and expansion or renovations to meet EYC program delivery criteria. Professional affiliation with the program as an early childhood coach and resource support provided a means and opportunity to gain access and get *inside* to spend concentrated periods of time observing and shadowing the ECE team in the preschool program.

Online questionnaire. The Provincial Program Administrator/ Supervisor Online Questionnaire was used as a supplemental component to expand on participants'

attitudes, practices, and capacities of assessment practices within early learning programs by ECEs (Morse & Niehaus, 2009). Responsibilities of program supervisors include making decisions regarding the content of the program as well as the assessment practices and procedures used by the ECEs working directly with the children. An online questionnaire addressed to Program Administrators/ Supervisors provided an avenue to gather their perspectives and attitudes on early learning assessment practices. Provincial Program Administrator/ Supervisors were introduced to the online questionnaire at a professional development conference in October 2011 hosted by the Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) of PEI and further reminders were sent through email. The list of Program Administrator/Supervisors (n=68) was obtained from the Directory of Licensed Early Childhood Programs (2011).

Data Collection Methods

Below each data collection method is presented and linked to the specific research question(s) the data addressed. The research protocols and procedures utilized are described .

Questionnaire for Provincial Program Administrators/Supervisors. A

provincial perspective of program assessment practices and the role of assessment in early learning programs were collected through an online questionnaire to address the research questions:

- 1) What is the perceived role of child assessment in the programs offered in an Early Years Centre?
- 2) To what extent do early learning programs attend to the assessment of young children's learning and development?

Current literature was used to inform the design of items in the questionnaire. An iterative process of item development incorporated feedback from my supervisor as well as Creswell's (2008) features of good questionnaire construction (e.g., ordering and variety of questions developed). The questionnaire included 13 questions: (a) five questions provided a six-point scale selection, (b) two selected response scenario-based questions with three and four choices respectively, (c) five demographic characteristics, and (d) one open-ended item was included to allow participants to describe their experiences that were not captured in the selected response format response.

Questionnaire development also included the review and testing of the questionnaire by the Program Administrator from the case study site who provided feedback on terminology, insight into construct development, and viable response alternatives for the scenario-based items.

Online questionnaire participants. The online questionnaire participants from across PEI constituted a small group of less than 100 participants. The promotion and collection of results using an online questionnaire was informed by the research conducted by Converse, Wolfe, Huang, & Oswald (2008). Converse et al. cited a 15% increase in the return of survey results with follow-up support in their study using mail and email/web surveys.

FluidSurveys version 4.0 - S1 © 2011 was the online format selected for use. The FluidSurveys platform enabled the design of a clear, crisp format to balance the amount of text posed in several questions. The Early Childhood Development Association of PEI annual fall conference in October 2011 included a two-day pre-conference leadership sessions for program supervisors. This forum was an ideal venue to personally introduce

the study and invite completion of the questionnaire to 25 Program Administrators/ Supervisors representing 21 of the 64 programs. Copies of the information-consent letters with the electronic invitation link were distributed.

Following the conference venue, all 64 programs received two email reminders about the study, which included the information-consent forms and direct electronic link for the questionnaire. Follow-up calls to confirm or secure accurate email addresses were made to four programs.

In total, there were 23 respondents who completed the questionnaire, 20 identified that they were a Director/Supervisor, 10 identified as Owners', and 5 also selected the Program Administrator title. Response rates in completion of the questionnaire were consistent with the results that Shih and Fan (2009) reported in their meta-analysis comparing response rates in email and paper surveys. From a sectorial perspective, the ECDA of PEI has been promoting online surveys for several years with Supervisors and ECE members with consistent response rates of 30% (S. Hooper, personal communication, November 16, 2011).

The advantage of an online questionnaire offered Program Administrator/ Supervisors anonymity and a forum to share assessment practices without repercussion of judgment of what should or should not be occurring. Such anonymity would not have been gained with interviews or focus group methods. The questionnaire provided access to detailed information on assessment practices within early learning programs and rich data to support the case study data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The case study data provided an up-close data source while the questionnaire allowed for a broader probing of how the issues and challenges were being addressed in others centres across the province.

Telephone surveys may have increased participation however openness of responses may have been compromised in striving to provide a perceived correct answer. A consideration for future collection would be to extend the time frame for collection to coincide with professional events attended by Program Administrator/Supervisors.

The largest portion of respondents, 19 out of 23, identified they were in a provincial government designated program. Five of the respondents indicated they were from a private centre and four identified their auspice as non-profit (See Appendix F).

Online questionnaire data analysis. Data for each question was compiled from the FluidSurveys version 4.0 - S1 © 2011 website. Reports were generated for review and analysis using Microsoft© Excel and Word. The first step in the data analysis of the questions was to code and identify trends, issues, and patterns that had also emerged in the case study. The second step was to calculate the mean averages and standard deviation for all questions that used the Likert scales to determine the breadth between respondents' answers. The last step was to discuss the trends, issues, and patterns. The online questionnaire upon analysis provided another dimension of insight into the assessment of young children's learning and development from a provincial perspective through Program Administrators/Supervisors.

Participant observation. The participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and ECE journals as data collection processes addressed the next two research questions:

- 1) To what extent do early learning programs attend to the assessment of young children's learning and development?
- 2) To what extent do early childhood educators attend to the assessment of young children's learning and development?

The subjective nature of child observation and assessment is influenced and informed through the ECEs' understanding of child development theories and knowledge of the child as an individual within their cultural and social experiences. The pedagogical approaches employed also influence and direct the ECEs' choices in collection of observations and interpretation. The pedagogical approaches utilized in the *Reggio Emilia approach*, and *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Care* promote making learning visible to the child, parents, and ECE. Of particular interest within this research inquiry is the value that ECEs place on assessment, in particular, child assessment processes informed and validated through observation of the child within the early learning environment.

Participant observation was conducted during the ECE's daily activities and interaction with the children in their care. An observation period occurred with each of the three ECEs during the morning portion of the day and during an afternoon portion to gather data that represented a holistic reflection of the ECE's duties and activities. The observations occurred within a two-week period for a total of 16 hours with each of the three ECEs participating and an additional 4 hours, seven weeks later with ECE #1 providing a total of 20 hours of observation. *The Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators (OSECE), Section A: Child Development, Learning and Care* were used as a framework to collect and organize observation data. The data collected were organized into the following eight sub categories: (a) usage of a variety of observation and documentation techniques, (b) facilitation of cognitive development of children, (c) facilitation of language development of children, (d) facilitation of social development of children, (e) facilitation of acceptance of diversity, (f) facilitation of emotional

development of children, (g) facilitation of creative development of children. and (h) facilitation of physical development of children (See Appendix G).

Observation framework. In addition to the written notes collected using the OSECE frameworks during the observation of each ECE, digital photographs were used to capture moments of significance where possible. As well, I recorded my own reflections and impressions creating a substantial record of data for analysis. Although every attempt was made to record digital photographs without causing interference in the interactions and flow of events, the ECE staff were curious and eager to discuss observation recordings, especially following the recording of an event using digital photographs.

During participant observation, the following significant events occurred enhancing the data collected and reflexivity: (a) resources used by ECEs for assessment were reviewed, (b) an observation of an ECE sharing with a parent recent assessment and progress report information occurred, (c) attendance at a full staff meeting to discuss with the research being conducted and merits of the portfolio and learning story processes emerging in the preschool program, and (d) the provision of pocket-sized digital cameras and *post-it notes* to capture photographs for documentation and assessment during the data collection process. Participants are identified with the numerical order of their participation in the study and letter initials as a means of distinguishing between the participants. Participants have in their informed consent given permission to use the actual names however use of initials does offer privacy and allow focus of readers' attention to be on the findings rather than identities of the individuals.

Additionally, as the portfolio process had just recently been implemented and only ECE # 2, KC, was at the time of the study exploring the process of learning story approach as an assessment method, a collection of learning story documentation samples and story guides (developed by Sherri Rose and Leigh White from the UNB Early Childhood Research Centre) were provided for reference and reflection. ECE # 1, KM expressed an interest in developing her skills in this area and ECE # 2, KC extended collegial support and collaboration. There was a five-week period between the observations and semi-structured interviews to allow time to explore the samples of learning story approach resources and development of their own learning story narratives.

The participant observation with each of the three educators revealed rich and varied experiences, education, and perspectives. They occurred with all three of the ECE staff from the preschool group for a total of 20 hours of observation. The amount of participant observation time and background information for each ECE is:

(a) ECE # 1, CM. Two observation periods of four hours were conducted seven weeks apart. The first four-hour block was in the morning; the second four-hour block was in the afternoon and included a review of learning story documentation. CM is the longest serving member in the preschool team at the Early Years Centre (EYC), which at this time was four years. In the time she has worked at EYC, she has always been with 3- to 5-year old children. CM graduated in the 1990s with her BA prior to moving into the area of early childhood education as an EC assistant. In the mid-1990s, she completed her ECE training. CM has worked in licensed childcare programs in Ontario, Nova Scotia, and PEI. During the

preschool years with her own children, she chose to operate a childcare service from her home and returned to the licensed early learning and care sector in 2007.

(b) ECE #2, KC. One block for 6 hours which included the morning and afternoon portion of her time with the children was observed and learning story approach documentation and children's portfolios reviewed. KC was the newest member of the pre-kindergarten team and had only been with the group for one month when the observations occurred. KC had been employed at EYC since the fall of 2010. Her predecessor in the preschool program had started the children's portfolio folders and completed the developmental checklist to which KC was enhancing with learning story documentation. KC completed her early childhood training in the United Kingdom in 2003. She has been practicing in Canada since 2010 and has gained certification through the PEI Childcare Facilities Board with her educational credentials from the UK.

(c) ECE # 3, LM. One block of 6 hours, which included the morning and short portion of the afternoon with the children and a parent conference in which she discussed assessment results for one child. LM reported that conducting observations according to the checklist provided and preparing reports for discussion with parents was a new experience for her. LM had worked for several years in the early learning and childcare sector and in 2010 completed the one year accelerated ECEC program at Holland College where she secured her

diploma. Upon completion of the ECEC program, she commenced full-time employment with EYC in the pre-kindergarten program.

The participant observations concluded with a five-week period before the semi-structured interviews occurred allowing ECE # 1, CM and ECE # 2, KC time to explore learning story documentation and complete portfolio resources for those children leaving the program and moving to kindergarten in the fall. Patton (2002) discussed collaborative participant observation as related to principles of feminist inquiry contribute to “participatory processes that support consciousness-raising and researcher reflexivity, and knowledge generation” (p. 269). Participant observation confirmed my expectation that the study would raise awareness and foster greater insight into observational assessment practices that naturally unfold daily as educators interact with the children and conduct activities.

Time between the observation and semi-structured interview provided time for reflection on conversations with each of the ECEs during observations, their inquiries, the collection of photographs, and field notes. To support the ECEs’ inquiries and interests in fostering the assessment processes they were engaged in, articles gathered and provided at the interview session to support their explorations in using learning narratives to document the learning and development of the children and reflections for journal activities. The articles were: (a) Curtis & Carter’s (2008), *A thinking lens for reflective teaching* excerpt; (b) Seitz (2008), *The power of documentation in early childhood classroom*; and (c) DiNatale, Steele, Elliot (2009) *How can we find out together?* Each of the ECEs also agreed to maintain journals to record their reflections and queries as a

result of their participation in the research. Of particular interest were influences the research had on what they chose to document and record.

Semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview process was selected as it afforded opportunity to clarify and discuss observation results, delve deeper into reflections on practices, and capture the ECE's experiences and perspective. The semi-structured interview process was selected as a means to allow the interviewee a sense of freedom and questions organized carefully.

Designed to move through the domain systematically, so the interview is controlled by the researcher, seeking targeted, specific information; although the participant has 'freedom within limits' to express his or her opinions and tell of his or her experiences, the researcher keeps the participant "on track." (Morse & Niehaus, 2009, p. 92)

The interviews were arranged at the end of their workday in a private meeting space in a municipal building located in proximity to the early learning centre. The space provided physical comfort with adult office chairs and table as well as private quiet space for reflection and discussion. Recognizing that it was the end of their workday and as a gesture of respect, each participant was contacted just prior to our meeting time to identify and purchase their nutritional and beverage preferences to aid in their comfort during the interview. Participants were provided with informed consent documentation prior to commencing the interview and were advised of their authority to stop the digital recorder at any point during the interview process. The interview questions and protocol were designed for a 30-minute time period; in practice the averages for each interview was more than 60 minutes and were preserved through digital records and transcription.

The interview questions were not provided in advance and each interviewee was asked not to discuss the questions with each other until everyone had completed the interview process. The journals followed as a data collection process in order to capture additional reflection and thinking as a result of the ECE experiences from the observations and interview.

The semi-structured nature of the interview enabled each interview to provide a unique focus and individual depth resulting in contemporary storytelling as each person shared their accounts in response to the questions posed. Fontana & Fray (2000) suggested that “interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results” (p. 646). The interview data gave voice to each participant’s results in a rich account of individual experiences and context of their understanding and practices in early learning assessment. The semi-structured interview questions were transcribed by a transcriptionist, reviewed and edited by the researcher and then provided to participants for verification prior to data analysis. In total six hours of interview data was transcribed and analyzed (See Appendix H).

Journals and assessment artifacts. As previously discussed, in conversing with each of the ECE participants at the conclusion of the observations and prior to the interviews, they agreed to maintain reflection journals. The purpose of the journals was to provide an avenue to document each of the ECEs independent reflection of their experiences in the study and capture samples of assessment data and methods. The week following the interviews, journal supplies, which included zippered soft plastic portfolio, scribbler, supply of *Post It Notes*, pens and pencils were provided by the researcher to

each ECE. These resources were enhanced with the provision of pocket sized digital cameras provided by the program owner. A list of reflection questions compiled by Carter & Curtis (2008) entitled “A Thinking Lens for Reflective Teaching” was provided to each of the ECEs at the semi-structured interview and intended to give a framework for reflection; however, I did not implicitly dictated this, instead referring to it as a potential resource to support reflections. At the interview, two articles—DiNatale, Steele, and Elliot (2009) “How Can We Find Out Together?” and Seitz (2008) “The Power of Documentation in the Early Childhood Classroom”—were provided to guide and support the ECEs’ emerging assessment practices. The articles were provided as a resource to the ECEs as well as a compilation of learning narrative samples. The resources were identified by ECE #2, KC, as helpful in considering the outcomes in the narratives she was writing and changed the process to reflect greater depth in the narratives she compiled. ECE # 3, LM, indicated that she was familiar with one of the articles from course work in her ECE diploma training program.

The data provided rich in-depth reflections and recording by two of the three ECEs. The limitations of this type of reflection are addressed further in the analysis of data and the perspective of the third educator recorded. Creswell (2008) recommends that when asking participants to keep a journal specific guidelines including topics, format, and length of entries be directed. Although each of the ECE was invited to record their thoughts, reflections, and thinking as a result of the research experience, there was uncertainty about what to record. For example , KC indicated, *I didn’t know what to write in this book. I used it like a diary to write conversations, details, and events, details about children or activities* (research journal, June 2011). From a research standpoint,

limited direction was provided in what to write in order to capture in written form, any critical thinking and reflection of the individual ECE. The journal entries collected from the ECEs were recorded for a four-week period and have indeed captured each individual's unique reflection process. Janesick (2000) identified the use of journaling by researcher and research participants (as co-researchers) as a rigorous documentary tool.

Debrief focus group. A debrief session of approximately one hour was to be held with each ECE to discuss the observation and semi-structured interview data. In conversing with each of the ECEs about a time to have a discussion, they were insistent and in agreement that they would prefer to gather as a group to debrief the research experience and validate interview transcripts. At the outset of this study, participants were advised this experience with them was as co-researchers; therefore their wishes were respected and we gathered within a focus group format. As Mandriz (2000) pointed out, focus groups are most successful in situations where participants feel comfortable to share their ideas, beliefs, and attitudes with others of the same gender background and similar experiences. The preschool team was relatively new to each other as a collaborative team at the outset of this research study. Through the participant observations period, semi-structured interviews, and from a preliminary scan through their journals their growth as a collaborative unit was witnessed further supporting the opportunity to use a focus group format for this final data collection. Mandriz (2000) stated that focus groups reduce the influence of the interviewer (researcher in my case) and tilt the balance of power toward the group.

Participants indicated that they would like to share a meal as discussions and reflections occurred and selected a local restaurant for the meeting. The discussion was

digitally recorded and detailed notes were recorded as a backup to the recording as noise from other patrons was difficult to screen out. There was no formal interview guide developed for the focus group. The discussion began with a confirmation of interview transcripts, which lead into a rich, animated, discussion among all members highlighting areas of interest in assessment practices and behaviours. The focus group discussion illuminated Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) concept of "shared stocks of knowledge" (as cited in Mandriz, 2000, p. 841).

Data Management and Analysis Strategies

The data were stored securely in three locations on an external travel drive, portable travel drive, and my personal computer (which is not shared with anyone else) with a password protected screen saver. The external travel drive was always stored in a locked metal file cabinet along with other data such as audio, photographs, and paper transcripts. Data also included materials supplied by participants such as photographs, assessment materials, or policy statements. The data were accessible only to thesis advisors. All data (recordings, transcripts) will be destroyed three years after defense of this thesis.

Participant observation & semi-structured interviews. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) challenged the realist approach in analysis of interview data presenting instead a narrative approach for analysis that opens the data as cultural stories. The semi-structured interviews conducted with the ECEs and Program Administrator and/or Supervisor added a narrative dimension to the study additionally enriched with journal and focus group data. Carr (2001) stated "Learning story assessments mirror and protect the complexity of learning by using a narrative approach" (p. 181). Carr promoted learning stories as a

medium in which to articulate and demonstrate children's learning outcomes and dispositions. The observations and ECE interview results afforded an opportunity to apply this process in articulating findings in a manner for knowledge translation and an artifact they may choose to include in career portfolios. Carr further asserted "Assessment then has four characteristics: it is about everyday practice, it is observation-based, it requires an interpretation, and it points the way to better learning and teaching" (p. 19). Through the compilation of observation and ECE interview data into narrative learning stories, a process of reading, reflection, and writing and rewriting allows for inductive content analysis (Patton, 2002).

Trustworthiness Features

The participation of ECEs and program supervisors was a voluntary process. Participants' time and the reflection of their experiences were respected and were represented to cause no known harm to the participants and or the organizations they represented. Where possible throughout the data collection process, participants' valuable contributions to the research were recognized. For example, nutritional snacks and beverages were provided for the interview, observation collection resources were provided to support each ECE in finding a collection process, interview transcripts provided to review and confirm, a meal was provided at the focus group. As an additional gesture of respect for ECE participation, a request to the PEI Childcare Facilities Board to recognize 10 hours of time recorded as professional development was submitted and accepted. All ECEs are required to complete thirty hours of ongoing training required every three years to maintain their certification.

As Rogoff (as cited in Sheridan, 2007) suggested, “Differences for perspective are necessary for seeing and for understanding but it is impossible to take another person’s perspective in an unprejudiced fashion, implying that the perspective of the ‘other’ will always mirror the perspective of the ‘onlooker’ to some extent”(p. 204). In order to balance subjectivity and strive for objectivity, the triangulated reflexive inquiry framework guided analysis and interpretation of data. The triangulated reflexive inquiry involves three sets of questions: (a) my own self reflectivity, (b) the reflexivity of those studied, and (c) the reflexivity of those receiving the study (Patton, 2002). In addition to the debriefing after observations and interviews, data collection participants were offered the opportunity to review data analysis descriptions and narratives prior to public access to the study

Study Limitations

The limitations of this study are as follows:

- The study is not representative of the assessment practices for all early childhood educators in Prince Edward Island; however, it provides one perspective on: (a) the types of assessment methods practiced, (b) how assessment data is utilized, (c) supports and challenges in the collection interpreting assessment data; and (d) sampling of how information is shared with children and their families.
- The study did not explore the role of parents in the assessment process or the parental perspective of assessment practices and methods to communicate their child’s development and learning.

- The accommodation of infant care within most early learning programs is a recent development as a result of EYC funding and designation criteria. Most EYCs are currently at the beginning stages for developing infant care programs and practices therefore the assessment practices of children in the infant age group are not included in this study and would be most appropriate to consider after programs have more experience in the inclusion of infant care.
- The Early Years Centre selected for the case study met study criteria and also had a professional relationship with the researcher prior to the study. The professional relationship between the researcher, owner, and Program Administrator/Supervisor involved implementation of evaluation tools to address global quality of the environment. As a result of this professional relationship and working collaboratively through a number of challenges prior to working on this research study, both parties were familiar with each other's biases and communication styles.

Summary

The case study exploration and online questionnaire resulted in an abundance of data for analysis and discussion. The data sets within the EYC case study create a portrait of assessment practices just like a portrait reflect the layers, planes, and shadings. Through participant observation, a close and personal view of each ECE's work was captured and formed the background to begin to uncover each person's thinking, approaches, understandings, and misunderstandings on the topic of assessment. A good portrait is intended to show the subject's deeper qualities that may not be visible on the

day-to-day. The semi-structured interviews allowed for a deeper reflection and exploration to uncover the individual educational and professional experiences of each ECE as well as capturing their perspectives on assessment and theoretical influences especially as related sociocultural, resources that support and thwart effective assessment practices. The debrief focus group provided an avenue for participants to confirm research data, discuss their experience in the research, identify confusions, and celebrate their growth as a team.

A case study data was used to inform the topic and design of questions for the online questionnaire provided for Program Administrator/Supervisors across the province. Questionnaire data refined the emergent themes revealing another perspective on the perceived role of assessment of children's learning and development, methods employed, frequency of practices, and areas for continued research. The emerging themes across the data sets, framed the gaps, complexities, and tensions experienced from the frontline ECE and Program Administrator/Supervisor perspectives, and illuminate the capacity of ECE to construct holistic portraits of children framed through authentic assessment practices.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

In this chapter, the research findings are presented from each of the data collection sources and the online questionnaire. The case study included: (a) 20 hours of participant observation including notes and photographs to document, (b) six hours of semi-structured interviews, (c) Early Childhood Educator (ECE) journal entries and assessment artifacts, and (d) one focus group discussion. The case study produced an abundance of data to analyze and addressed these research questions:

- 1) To what extent do early learning programs attend to the assessment of young children's learning and development?
- 2) To what extent do early childhood educators attend to the assessment of young children's learning and development?
- 3) What is the perceived role of child assessment in the programs offered in an Early Years Centre?

In turn, the online questionnaire data was used to triangulate case study data and also address the research questions:

- 1) To what extent do early learning programs attend to the assessment of young children's learning and development?
- 2) What is the perceived role of child assessment in the programs offered in an Early Years Centre?

Case study data is presented first followed by the online questionnaire data to reflect the concurrent themes and patterns the data illuminates. The questionnaire data refined emergent patterns and collective relationships with the observation and interview data revealing the perceived role of assessment of children's learning and development,

methods employed, and frequency of practices and areas for continued research and development.

Case Study

The study criteria was a successful means to narrow the number of Early Years Centres (EYCs) and their early learning programs to select for participation. The program selected was well-known to the researcher and was one experiencing the least amount of disruption as result of ECE transition to kindergarten into the public education system and expansion or renovations to meet the provincial government's new EYC program delivery criteria. The program needed no renovations or expansions and had only experienced the loss of two educators with the transition of the kindergarten program to the public education system. The EYC program, located in a township within Prince Edward Island (PEI) was in proximity for both urban and rural residents with young children and had been in operation for five years. The facility had been extensively renovated for barrier free access, with research informed décor for neutral colours (Carter & Curtis, 2003; Olds, 2001), wood furniture, child designed features such as classroom sinks, and direct access for outdoor play spaces. The environmental features of the facility, selection of resources, and equipment were intended to support ECEs in the delivery of developmentally appropriate activities with the children. In addition to a well-developed indoor environment, the outdoor space had also been purposely designed to serve as an extension of the indoor facility and provided access to a variety of play spaces and equipment most suitable for outdoor play.

The owner of the program and staffing unit had participated voluntarily in the *Measuring and Improving Kids Environments* (MIKE) and *Bridges* programs to measure,

monitor, and develop indoor and outdoor environments using the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised Edition* (ECERS-R) scale (Harms et al., 2005) and *SpeciaLink Early Childhood Inclusion Quality* (SLECIQS) Scale (Hope-Irwin, 2009). These experiences combined with the desire of the Program Administration and ECE team in providing quality early learning and child care experiences cultivated an openness and willingness to participate in a research inquiry into early learning assessment practices.

The owner of the program actively recruited and hired trained ECE personnel and supported the ongoing professional development of staff. The program owner provided staff with membership in the Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) of PEI for access to professional development three times a year at reduced rates, paid time for attendance at provincial PD events and in-house professional development such as the Insights®² training conducted while participating in the research study. There were three ECE staff and one Special Needs Assistant (SNA) working with 3to5 year-olds in the preschool group. One ECE had been employed with the program for four years, the other two participating ECE in the preschool group had been employed with the program for a year. One ECE had transitioned from the infant program to the preschool program the month prior to participation in the study.

There were 36 children enrolled in the preschool group, 26 attended full-time and 10 part-time. The preschool program within the EYC served a diverse group in terms of

² Insights® Training provides analysis and interpretation of online questionnaire results for individuals that outlines dimensions of their personality, communication strengths, and interpersonal skills. The training is then used to strengthen interactions and team work with others.

abilities, culture, socioeconomic of children 3 to 5 years. The inclusion of children with exceptional needs provided the program with access to funding for additional staffing which included a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) to support the data collection and implementation of individual program goals for these children and weekly collaboration with other professionals involved with the children. The diversity of the program had also been enhanced with the increased immigration of families from other countries into the province, through national and international adoptions, creating a multicultural mosaic of people, cultural practices, and experiences. When asked about the cultural experiences being shared within the program one research participants response was *We kind of take it with open arms because it's a way for us to learn too* (LM, June 16, 2011). The composition of family structures, economic circumstances of families, and exceptionalities reflected a broad range of family situations in the preschool program.

Participant Observations

The purpose of the participant observations was to follow each of the participating ECEs for a day, immersing into the daily work, to experience, question, mediate, and bracket researcher's knowledge and understanding of assessment practices. The participant observations provided a rich firsthand perspective on the pace of the day, the daily schedule, the utilization of indoor and outdoor environments, and experience the culture of the teams work together in the space. The *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* (OSECE) section on observation and assessment was utilized as a resource and served as a lens to filter and organize the rich observational data (Child Care Human Resource Sector Council, 2010). The observation data reflected the variety of observation and documentation techniques used by the ECEs and the ways in which the

observation practices were supported or impeded by the program. The ways in which information from parents' observations of their children were sought. How the ECEs communicated about observations with team members and families. How observations were used to support the ECEs and program in the facilitation of children's cognitive, language, social, emotional, physical, and creative development and acceptance of diversity. Documentation and checklists were reviewed to screen for non-biased language and interpretation of observations.

The pedagogical practices within early learning environments are holistic in nature with a learning disposition, developmental or functional skill providing direction in guiding activities, interactions to provision and foster children's experiences. Development across all domains is interrelated where a focus of development in one area crosses into other areas. For example, the rainbow colour explorations provided opportunity for development across all domains (See Figure 4.1). The following photographs document an example of how ECE staff used observation to inform planning of creative activities. Participants will be referred to with letter initials as a means of distinguishing between the participants and allowing for privacy of comments recorded. When CM's group discussed the painting of their space station, the children were clearly interested in rainbow colours, which CM provisioned for through a selection of paint colours and paint brushes. The ECE team discussed how the rainbow painting had been a topic for several days and then made painting and a selection of colours accessible in the art area. The mural painting depicted in Figure 4.1 reflects the ECEs' provisioning of this observed interest and the children's work to create the rainbow space station. Each of the ECEs could readily identify areas of development being fostered and significant learning

and development for each child. For example one of the children pictured, who enrolled in the program approximately one year before the research study, had limited gross or fine motor development, difficulty expressing ideas, and labelling and managing emotions. This child coped by disengaging from social interactions through dramatic emotional frustration and distress. Several months later, this child made huge gains in managing emotions, taking risks to learn, controlling the paint brush, cooperating with others, and communicating, and articulate thinking, while exploring rainbow colours. The developmental checklist for this particular child did not measure the depth of his developmental gains and, if listed, were indicated either as *needs assistance often* or *not at this developmental skill*. McAfee and Leong (2011) asserted the importance of collecting multiple perspectives and using a variety of measures as reflected in the case scenario discussed.



Figure 4.1 Extending the children's interest in rainbow painting

Facilitation of Children's Development

Throughout the observation periods, the facilitation of teacher-directed activities and child-initiated explorations provided opportunity for the facilitation of cognitive, language, social, emotional, creative, and physical development and acceptance of diversity. Each of the ECE staff approached her work with the children in a unique manner with numerous instances in which each area of development was facilitated through a variety ECE lead and child-initiated activities and interactions. For example, KC was observed sitting with children conversing about their constructive play and posing problem solving questions to extend the experience. She met one-to-one with children to conduct a Mother's Day questionnaire which, promoted descriptive language and made children's thinking visible. As well, she engaged in social conversation during the meal and snack routines. CM was observed facilitating and mediating a significant number of social-emotional interactions within her small group activities. For example,

CM brought an old laptop to serve as a prop for the space station. This created a situation for two boys to manage and self-regulate their behaviour. By the end of the play exploration, one boy was mentoring the other on how to open the lid, and they were sharing the prop with no conflict. LM was in tune with the overall climate and energy needs of the whole group and the organizing force for whole group activities. For example with ease she organized the Mother's Day pots and plantings and all children involved in the activity. She suggested adjustments to the daily schedule with an earlier rest period and longer play time outdoors in an effort to accommodate the children's energy levels.

Observation and Documentation Techniques

Observations were documented using a range of methods such as notes, photos, and videos. Also, many artefacts were viewed and events that occurred. For example there were two display areas where project activities and a recent field trip were profiled. There were portfolio binders with samples of art work and narratives. The developmental checklist used by ECEs for parent-ECE conferences. As well, there was an opportunity to observe a parent conference where the ECE shared the checklist information. At the entrance to the preschool area, a parent information board contained documentation of a recent field trip and a project still underway about space shuttles. The space shuttle documentation included samples of the children's art and text representing the children's explanations as scribed by the ECE (See Figure 4.2). The field trip documentation included descriptive text and photographs about the children picking strawberries in preparation for the annual strawberry social hosted for parents. At departure, on one observation day, as a child was greeted by a parent and picked up in that area, the child

caught sight of his photograph in the strawberry picking display (See Figure 4.3). I was able to observe a lengthy discussion between the child and his parents before departing. The space shuttle project and strawberry picking field trips displays demonstrated documentation of the children's engagement with activities and value for the children's art work. The significant learning outcomes, learning dispositions, functional skills, and development being fostered were not included in this documentation. The displays were posted at adult level for parents and visitors, limiting children's access to revisit and discuss the experience. The boards were places to display the children's work and photographs for special events such as the strawberry picking field trip.



Figure 4.2 Space project



Figure 4.3 Parent-child conversation

Developmental Checklists

The assignment of children into three groups (one smaller group per ECE) commenced three months prior to the participation in the study. Each ECE was assigned a group of children for whom they were responsible to collect documentation, conduct planning, and supervise. CM indicated that it had enhanced her relationship with each of the children and, as a result of closely monitoring their development and activities, she knew their learning and development needs better. The completion of developmental checklists had recently been implemented for the first time with the preschool group. When probed about this action, the ECEs stated they were completed to provide the parents of the children transitioning to kindergarten with documented information about their development and readiness skills. Two of the ECEs, CM and LM, indicated that this was the first time they had used this particular developmental checklist assessment form. KC did not complete the developmental checklist assessments as they were completed by another ECE who worked with the group prior to her.

Portfolios

Portfolios containing samples of the children's work and anecdotal notes were being maintained by all three ECEs. KC used digital photography to complete learning narratives and include them in the children's portfolio. The samples reviewed included whole group activity and individual narratives. All three ECEs expressed concern with some items in the developmental checklist they were using indicating a revision would be needed to ensure it was developmentally-appropriate for the age group. At the time of the study, the developmental checklist was the main feature of children's portfolios, which also included samples of art work, group photographs of shared activities or of the child posing, questionnaire surveys (All about Me), and a growth sample of their handprint.

The portfolios showed promise and, over the course of the study were enriched with information about dispositions, learning or developmental outcomes occurring, children's conversations included in learning stories, and photographs of three dimensional art and construction projects were documented.

Documenting through Narratives

During time spent with KC, it was evident that she was at ease with the use of technology in the program using the laptop computer to design, with the children's input, a page for their handprints and Mother's Day gifts. In exploring the use of technology with her, she shared how she was using technology to document observations and capture learning through digital photographs with short narratives. CM indicated that she wanted to become comfortable with using computer technology and the process of learning story documentation. In discussion with the owner and Program Administrator to acknowledge the importance of the learning story narratives and support the further development of

this method by staff, it was suggested that pocket-sized digital cameras and access to color printing resources would support the ECEs. The technological resources were supplied and supplemented with samples of learning story narrative resources from the researcher to support the ECE team's documentation. Peer mentoring between the ECEs to use technology, the provision of digital cameras and resources (articles and narrative samples) supported the ECEs in prioritizing observational data and to develop documentation practices. The ECE, who at the onset of the study expressed discomfort with technology as a medium to document and record learning stories, had overcome this challenge between observations and interviews through peer mentoring support.

Parent Conference with the Developmental Checklist

The observation time with LM provided opportunity to witness a parent conference in which the checklist information for a five year old transitioning to kindergarten was reviewed. The meeting was held in a small administrative office space where there as just enough room for three adults. The child wanted to attend the meeting and was discouraged by both LM and the parent. They asked the child to keep playing and physically redirected her back toward the play area and her friends. Once settled in the meeting space, LM shared with the parent the developmental checklist completed (one month prior to the meeting), provided an overview of the content, and stated that she had *no worries across the board* about the child's development. The parent inquired as to whether the checklist was new as a result of kindergarten moving into the public school system. LM explained that the checklist resource was one that had been shared by another early learning program. LM stated that the checklist had helped her to more closely attend to what children can do, know, and need assistance with. The checklist had

provided a focus for her observations of the children and had informed the planning of activities. For example when she observed cutting skills, she noted that several children needed help in this area and planned more purposeful activities.

In completing the checklist for this child, LM stated that she had been able to complete most of the checklist based on observations she had conducted during play activities. The cognitive items on the checklist were completed through one-to-one time together with the child during free play activities within the playroom. LM did not describe how she set up or specific approaches or resources used to determine the cognitive development items. This issue led to a discussion of the EYE-DA (*Early Years Evaluation-Direct Assessment*) assessment that the child had recently completed at the school. The parent expressed surprise that the assessment took 45 minutes to complete and that she was not allowed to be present. The parent wondered if LM knew how EYE results would be shared back to the parent. LM indicated that as an ECE she was not aware of the reporting back process or had any information on the EYE assessment process.

The conversation moved back to the child's capabilities and discussion of her enjoyment for dance and her peer mentoring abilities with her friends with dance routines. At this point, the parent expressed concern and worry that her daughter was not able to remember some of her letters, stating that her son at this age was reading. The parent acknowledged that every child develops differently and has his or her own interests, however, the parent was concerned about her child's literacy skills. Although the child preferred to explore her dance activities and avoided sit down literacy activities like reading or drawing LM stressed that LM did not foresee the child would have any

difficulty with the transition to kindergarten. The child's portfolio was not shared, and it is also noteworthy that the portfolio did not reflect any documentation that identified the child's ability to mentor peers in dance routines or literacy skills the parent was concerned about. The developmental checklist items reflected *consistent* indicating the child had acquired the knowledge and skills and demonstrates it consistently for all items in the developmental checklist.

After the parent conference, LM expressed that this reporting process was a new experience. This case scenario highlights several areas for exploration and development. First, perhaps the child should partake in the conference. Second, perhaps the child should share his/her portfolio artefacts. Third, the portfolio should ideally reflect multiple perspectives and methods to measure. The ECE feedback indicated a revised developmental checklist was needed. The parent- ECE conference highlighted the need for a communication plan between the early learning program and public school about the EYE process reporting of assessment information.

Influence of Participant Observation on ECEs

The participant observation periods provided insight into current practices and a snapshot of the ways in which each ECE member in the preschool team conducted observation and viewed assessment in their day-to-day work with the children. At the onset, ECEs expressed concern that they were not doing a great deal of assessment, indicating the completion of the developmental checklists as a first time event in their program. In the researcher's documentation through photographs, situations in progress such as extending activities of interests (rainbow colours), and inquiry about thinking in incidences where children's learning dispositions were fostered, the ECEs seemed to

become revitalized and gained awareness of their undocumented assessment practices. The on-the-spot thinking based on observation, knowledge of the children, and relationship with the child was most evident in practices associated with fostering dispositions. As the observations unfolded, the ECEs became more aware of how they were using observational data to inform the planning of activities, transitioning the children through the daily routine, provisioning of spaces, and selection of children's exploration and play activities to document. Each ECE was open to discussing the practices and approaches being implemented and most often expressed surprise that what they perceived as every day, natural interactions were an example of using observation to inform and assess either a situation, a child's development, or teachable moments.

The Interviews

The semi-structured interviews with four participants provided an opportunity to clarify and discuss observation results, delve deeper into reflections on practices, and capture the ECEs' experiences and perspectives on assessment practices. Interview questions were informed by the participant observations and key items in the literature review. The interview climate was conversational with questions used to guide and, at the same time, gather information about each ECEs' education, experience, and their knowledge of the program, the children, and their families. The interview results reflected the ECEs' knowledge of the children's language, development, learning, cultural influences, and family supports.

When asked to describe the program, each of the ECEs identified three distinct programs for infants, toddlers, and preschools and immediately followed this information with the diversity of cultures reflected in each program. SR, the Program Administrator

and CM, an ECE, the longest serving members of the preschool team, seemed to have the most accurate knowledge of the children's racial backgrounds and cultural influences. All of the ECEs commented on the diversity and multi-racial representation of the families and the ways in which it enriched the experiences of children and staff. Relationships with parents varied depending on the needs of the children, the families' situation, and the disposition of the parents. Parents who had children with diagnosed disabilities or exceptionalities and immigrant families were identified as having hands on involvement in the program; sharing information about the child's Individual Program Plan or contributing to the program educationally through sharing and demonstrating cultural practices. The composition of families and economic situations were identified by the Program Administrator and ECEs as reflecting a variety of family structures (single parent, two parent, international adoption, etc.) and a broad range of economic situations. The Program Administrator and one ECE identified that although some of the children were learning other languages at home (French, Japanese, Swahili), English was the dominant and predominant language used in the program. Although the children represent multiracial backgrounds, the program had no processes and practices in place to reinforce or acquire other languages. The ECEs, although aware that some of the children might have been learning a second language at home, viewed English as the predominant and proficient language. The cultural influences within English-speaking and European backgrounds were difficult for ECEs and the Program Administrator to identify.

At the time interviews were conducted, the preschool team was experiencing changes with the membership of preschool group. Several children had left for the summer season and were replaced with children moving up from (graduating from) the

toddler group into the preschool program. The ECEs were also in discussion with the Owner and Program Administrator about changes in the management of the preschool group and utilization of space. CM was in favour of the smaller group as she felt it had enabled her to get to know the children to greater depth and enabled her to effectively focus more time and attention to her students, as she and the small group rotated through the different spaces in the environment. On the other hand, the management team was concerned that the children's freedom to explore within the whole space and self-selection of peer grouping were also important in moving deeper into emergent curriculum practices. The 45-minute rotations of the three smaller groups and dedicated supervision for the small group in the space posed a barrier for ECEs to collaborate and support each to complete observations.

Education and Experience

The diversity of education and experiences that the Program Administrator and each of the ECE members brought was richly reflected through the semi-structured interviews. SR, the Program Administrator, completed her diploma training in the 1990s in Nova Scotia and had participated in ongoing professional development opportunities in order to stay abreast with the current literature. In 2005, SR started with the EYC as a founding member of the ECE team and moved into the program administrator role in 2009. CM completed her training in the 1990s at both the university and college level in the Atlantic region. Her return to licensed early learning and child care occurred four years previously when joining the EYC. She identified that in returning to the licensed early learning program, the pedagogical practice of emergent curriculum was new to her prompting participation in professional development activities to update her

understanding of current trends and practices in early childhood. KC completed her early childhood training in the United Kingdom in 2003. She had been practicing in Canada since 2010 and had gained certification through the PEI Childcare Facilities Board with her educational credentials from the UK. LM had worked for several years in the early learning and childcare sector and in 2010 completed the one year accelerated ECEC program at Holland College, PEI, where she achieved her diploma. Upon completion of the ECEC program, she commenced full-time employment with program in the pre-kindergarten program.

Assessment Training

In probing for each educator, training related specifically to assessment in their training programs the responses were as follows:

We did record keeping, which is more kind of the learning story side of it, cause we were very into learning stories...recording the play, the activities, any developmental learning that's taken place. (KC, June15, 2011)

If I remember correctly, a lot of child development, where they were at those particular stages, and when you were observing you are watching for: What are they doing when they're coloring, or when they're drawing? Is it large arm movements? It was geared towards the developmental side of it, so I guess, assessments...I don't remember any formal training on assessments. (CM, June 14, 2011)

LM recalled quickly that she had actually completed training in recording observations through anecdotal and running record formats. She also discussed course projects she

completed where she observed and documented the seven areas of development and completed learning stories. All three ECEs spoke to receiving training focused on the developmental aspects of assessment whether in checklist or learning story format. In this initial conversation about assessment, the use of assessment to inform planning or document children's learning and capabilities was not identified. LM, who was the most recent graduate from a training program, stated that she had not maintained the same level of written documentation for observations, however, her training and course projects in documenting developmental domains raised her awareness and had sharpened her focus on what to observe. She indicated that although she had not maintained the same level of written documentation, she was more focused in observing and preserving through memory: *Now we [I] think twice about it, how they pick up things or use their fine motor* (LM, June 16, 2011).

Although ECEs indicated they had limited formal training on assessment, the training in child development was evident and utilized. When each of the ECEs was asked about the developmental needs and characteristics displayed within their student groups, there was no difficulty in identifying areas of development: *I can go child by child on this* (CM, June 14, 2012). During the observations, it seemed that each ECE favoured or was inclined to see and support specific areas of development before others. Interestingly, these areas also corresponded with their responses in the interview. CM discussed fine motor skills, language development, and emotional development with regard to emotional regulation. KC, who had only been with the preschool group for a few months, reviewed each domain, identifying differences as a result of age and expected abilities and was the only one to focus attention on the area of cognitive

development. LM discussed her role as a mediator in supporting the children's social and emotional development.

Information Sources and Planning

When asked about sources available to gain more information about individual children, two of the ECEs discussed the importance of stepping back, observing to collect information and interacting with the child either in dialogue or engaged in an activity to further support the evaluation of the situation. Seeing the children as sources of information and the ECEs' knowledge of the child, as articulated in the following quote was the first line of action when concerned about a child's development.

Communication with the child too, finding out where they're coming from and how they're feeling, I mean, they're kind of their own little resource in themselves, when you get to know them, and help identify what their triggers might be, or what help they need. (CM, June 14, 2011)

Parents were also consistently identified as a primary source of information when concerned about a child along with collaboration and discussion with co-workers to gather information. The children's registration records were identified as a source of information depending on when the child registered in the program, though often times this information was outdated. Research and relying on written information through books and the Internet was the last source of information. Consultation with other professionals visiting the EYC such as Occupational Therapist, Bridges Coach, and Autism Consultant were also identified as a means of information by the Program Administrator and one of the ECEs. CM discussed the information and insights she had

learned about the children in using the developmental checklist to focus observations:

For one little guy I realized it is a confidence issue, he's quick to react or bug the person next to him, but so timid about trying something (CM, June 14, 2011). CM discussed sharing her observation results with parents and through this discussion gaining greater understanding about the child's temperament and approaches to learning. KC raised the demands of the daily routine and responsibilities in supervision of children as a negative impact in accessibility to conducting focused observations:

Your day goes by quick when you have a routine to stick to, you really don't have long periods with the children to be doing the kind of observation, like at school we had to do observations for forty-five minutes, and a lot of the time, with us moving areas and things, you don't have forty-five minutes with one child, so, you really have to integrate it in your day, and I've found short spells, like fifteen minutes, really work. (KC, June 15, 2011)

In summary, when concerned about a child's development, the ECEs consistently started with their knowledge of the children as a result of the observations they had conducted and interactions with the child. Conducting additional observations, interacting with the child, and consulting with co-workers were the initial steps the ECEs reported taking before seeking out parents. Human capital, the children, co-workers, parents, and other professionals were presented as primary sources of information. The use of written resources through books and the Internet informed as a last step in the consultation process. The portfolio resources and learning stories were not identified as sources of information used by the ECEs to access information about the children.

Informing Planning and Observational Practices

The Program Administrator expressed that “different teachers have different strategies” expanding on this point by discussing ECEs who plan for direct instructional activities to address a concern or skill development area and those that might plan through the provision of materials in the environment (for example, planning for small group cutting activities and ensuring other materials are accessible such as tongs to pick up objects and promote fine motor development).

ECEs identified that observations informed on children’s interests for planning of projects and activities. Identify the types of whole group, small group, and individual teaching or direct instruction activities to be provided as well as what provision of materials in the learning centres for promoting skill development. For example as this quote reflects:

Planning the activities using the observation information and seeing how the little guy who needs more confidence with cutting or drawing skills, you can set up activities that help draw out those. (CM, June 14, 2011)

I would try and direct some activities that focus on what I’m concerned with, so we can work on it, and again, I might do a big activity with the whole class or I might do just one or two children with me, or just focus with the child. (KC, June 15, 2011)

The ECEs’ awareness, knowledge, and application of child development were evident in their discussions of assessment whereas their awareness and application of

cultural influences were not as evident. The interviewees' awareness and use of socio-cultural information varied as reflected in these statements:

I never really thought about, unless it's right there in front of me, you don't really think that's where the background comes from. (LM, June 16, 2011)

Just by talking to them, getting to know them, you find out what's in those little suitcases. Just knowing them on a personal level, and talking to the parents because then you find out even little things like what they're doing on the weekend, or where they're going, and you can bring that up then . . . (CM, June 14, 2011)

I was telling the kids my background, cause mine's very different from theirs, and I would say to them, well, at Christmas I don't do this, and we don't do that, and our Santa wears green, and he doesn't wear red, I was trying to explain it to them, that ours is just different. (KC, June 15, 2011)

In discussing the means the program employed to embrace and reflect the multicultural diversity, one ECE identified having special events. These activities included a parent sharing the Eid (Muslim celebration) celebration cake, celebrating Chinese New Year and Canada Day celebrations. Cultural activities also included questionnaires sent to parents to compile information about different Christmas traditions and the creation of a cookbook of each family's favourite recipe. In working towards

embracing multicultural diversity, these activities and ongoing practices reflected elements of what Derman-Sparks (2010) referred to as tourist multicultural curriculum and also reflected elements of reciprocity in learning cultural traditions across the spectrum represented by the students in the program. This issue was an area in which ECEs expressed interest and, at the same time, seemed perplexed with. In posing the concept that each child carries with them a little backpack or suitcase of skills, experiences, and knowledge reflective of their families' cultural heritage, the interviewees engaged with this topic to differing degrees.

The methods used to track or maintain records of the children's learning and development were the portfolios, which included samples of children's drawings, art work, learning stories, and the developmental checklist. The development of portfolios was identified by the Program Administrator and ECEs as relatively new but basic practice. The documentation method most preferred and discussed by one ECE was the learning story approach and use of digital photographs. She discussed using digital technology to capture the creativity and construction designs of the stories that were documented through building activities in the block area and with Lego blocks. In using digital photographs to document learning stories, the children had begun to request that she photograph their work. The children's selection of work to document reflected emerging child self-assessment practices and the ECE built on this practice when she had the child co-author learning stories and captured their perspective. The following vignette reflects the types of incidences selected for documentation through the learning story narrative:

I've done that quite a lot with a couple little girls, they started singing 'hot potato, pass it on,' and then they were in the kitchen area and one of the girls started bringing stuff, so she did a red pepper, and the girl starts singing, 'hot pepper, pass it on,' and then a boy came with an onion, and she's going 'hot onion, pass it on' and it created this, they changed this song by what the kids were bringing them, and I wasn't involved in that at all, but I took photos did a story on it, because they were taking what they knew and made it into something else, but it was also one girl who did it, and she tends to be a quieter little girl, and she was being the leader of the activity because she's, she does a lot of singing, and she does, it was probably something that she felt quite confident in, whereas normally she would just sit back and follow everybody else, so that was another reason I did it, because it was showing, well look at her leadership skills, she can do this when she wants to, um, and I've never seen that brought out in her before, so that was kinda nice to see that. (KC, June 15, 2011)

ECes' orientation and theoretical influences on assessment are evident where KC using a learning narrative approach documented from a strength-based approach whereas KM in the next story reflected the ability of developmental checklists to identify needs:

I'm surprised with the huge impact that had, when we did the checklist. Because, there was [were] lots of things that, um, you kind of assumed that the kids could do, because you've seen them in group settings, and they've been at the table and they've had scissors and you're busy scurrying around and organizing everything, so you kind of assume they can, but when you've done the checklist

and you've worked one on one with them, and sat down with them and handed them the scissors and realized, well they're not really cutting, and they're holding the scissors the wrong way and it is a challenge for them, then, that changed then how you set out some, some things for them when you had those opportunities. So I, for me, I was really surprised with what I didn't know about them when we did the checklist. (CM, June 14, 2011)

These two vignettes reflect the different pedagogical approaches in gathering information to complete assessments. The learning narrative approach is conducted on the floor in action with the children, whereas the administration of the checklist seemed to prompt one-to-one time between ECE and child. In observing each of these ECEs in action, the use of space, planned activities, and approaches varied. The ECE who focused on learning stories also seemed most attentive to fostering language-cognitive development, whereas another ECE focused on social-emotional development was most attentive to supporting children with the development of self-regulatory skills. Each focus required either *on-action* or *of-action* responsive or reflexive interactions with children. Of-action allowed pockets of time to record and contemplate whereas, in supporting social and emotional development, on-action required rapid responsive interaction.

The Program Administrator and ECEs indicated that observations were conducted daily; however the collection and recording of information varied with each ECE. The ECEs were exploring a variety of ways to capture and document observations ranging from jotting notes on a piece of paper (anecdotal notes), taking a digital picture, and recording to memory. The portfolios as places to store observations and learning stories were providing ECEs with greater awareness about which children they might have been

overlooking in their documentation. The following vignette reflects the overload of information each ECE managed on a daily basis, rationalizing the importance of intentional planning and documentation of assessment information of each child's learning and development:

There's so much of it in my head, sometimes certain things will jump out at me and that's when I'll either grab a camera to try and capture because I can't filter everything, so, but other times it just, it'll get lost and then I'll see something else that will happen that they'll do outside or something that'll just, 'Ah, I've seen this . . . ' you know? Or, 'I've seen them . . . ' and some of those assessments, I could answer those questions without even watching them do it because when I'm outside, I am constantly watching them, like, 'Can they pump on a swing? Can they climb up on the climber?' I'm watching them at all times so I could check most of that stuff off without even having to ask them to do it because I constantly see where, developmentally they're at, and a lot of times you're watching it and you don't write it down, but it sticks with you too, so when you go back to it, you kind of know where they're at, so . . . (LM, June 16, 2011)

On a daily basis, ECEs relied on observation to assess the daily routine, select or reinforce project activities, decide what to document, and decide which children to gather information on. The developmental checklist and learning story approach were two different methods the ECEs used to document assessment information using the portfolio as a means to collect and organize information. Documentation of assessment results using the developmental checklist focused attention and ECEs' observations for the task

in preparing for parent conferences. Although there were several comments about changes to the developmental checklist, it was not clear if the ECEs felt at liberty to make these changes. The interpretation of observations within the sociocultural context of the children experienced is another area for exploration and development. ECEs required support and time away from responsibilities directly with the children to reflect and dialogue about sociocultural influences, address concerns with specific children, and ensuring that all children have documented information.

Resources and Barriers

The lack of formal planning and documentation time away from floor responsibilities with the children for the ECEs created barriers in finding the time to organize, analyze, and interpret observations. In trying to manage this challenge while with the children, observations were either not completely recorded or opportunities were missed with the children. The barrier of finding time away from responsibilities with the children for planning, reflection, and documentation led to a resourceful approach involving the children in the co-construction of documentation and inadvertently self-assessment practices. The preschool team were provided with a laptop, which enabled research, development of stories, and development of activity resources that included the children's input and involvement (See Figure 4.4). The following photograph documents how the laptop computer was used during observations to support the ECE to use on floor time with the children to prepare for an activity and involve a small group of children. The special page for the children's handprints for Mother's Day gifts were being designed by this small group of children with the selection of choices the ECE was making accessible. The conversation and discussion on the page-design allowed for

problem solving, creativity, and exploration of the children's thinking and understanding of cultural practices in regard to Mother's Day.



Figure 4.4 ECE and children collaborating

The documentation of observations and development of learning stories occurred during rest time or after regular work hours. Attempts had been made to provide each ECE with one hour of planning per week, which was not consistently provided due to floor responsibilities with the children and staffing quota nor was it a sufficient amount of time. The ECEs shared that the owner of the program was in the process of purchasing pocket-sized cameras for each of the ECEs rather than the one camera to be shared by all three programs (infant, toddler, and preschool programs). Multimedia technology was identified as supporting ECEs' efforts in documenting observations. The laptop computer and digital cameras were utilized on a daily basis. The ECEs were each at different levels of proficiency and comfort with using the technology thus creating mentoring opportunities among the team members (See Figure 4.5). The use of smartphones with

video capability was identified as a potential resource that required further discussion and development of communication processes with parents.



Figure 4.5 Mentoring and mediating the use of technology

KC shared that when factors permitted she used the laptop on the floor to complete a learning story with the child who was the subject of the story, retelling the event in the picture in order to make the child's perspective visible. She also often took photographs of the children's art work for their portfolios allowing her to collect more samples and enabling the child to take the piece home for the parent to see.

Parent Communication and Involvement

Each of the ECEs recognized the importance of communicating day-to-day with parents to build a positive relationship and develop open communication. The relationship was described as a partnership based on an understanding of the reciprocity of the child's experiences within the family unit and at the Centre. The display board for parents at the entrance to the play space was used as a place to display learning stories and learning events. One ECE's approach was to call the parents' attention to the story as a means to engage in dialogue with the parent. One ECE felt the display board was not

sought out by parents as much as she would like; however, her displays of the children's projects had generated dialogue with parents about the children's discussions about projects at home. Formal parent conferences had been conducted for the first time with parents in the preschool group where the ECEs provided the checklist and samples of the children's work for assessment information. The portfolio, a new resource, were not accessible on the floor to children or parents; however, they were made available if requested. KC identified the importance of the portfolios being made accessible on the floor to the children and their families.

Relationships between each of the ECEs and parents reflected the varying levels of interaction based on the length of time they had worked in the program and length of time the child had attended the program. The program hosted a number of special events throughout the year such as: Christmas dinner, strawberry social, graduation ceremonies, guest speaker events during the day, and a family literacy series of evening events. The preschool ECE team was moving toward increasing the level of communication with parents about program activities and the children's learning and development experiences through the formalized parent-teacher conference, portfolio, and display board documentation. The following quote summarizes why the ECEs thought it was important to involve parents in the education of their children:

I think it's important because we're only half the child's life, and they spend the other half of their childhood with their parents at home . . . if you turn around to parents and say, 'look, we're concentrating on numbers, we're counting up to twenty today,' the parents might start thinking, 'oh, maybe we should do that at home' and they'll say, you can have ten more bites, and you'll show them that

you need to develop and change because I know, well I know as a parent, you get very stuck in what you're doing, and sometimes you forget that your children are growing and they're changing and some parents I've known, well, it's more with the younger ones, I guess, but they kind of hold them back a little bit sometimes with parents, so if you're sharing the education, you're saying, well look what they can do, look what we're learning, and the parents might go, 'oh, I never thought of that!' you know, um, and again with teaching them simple things, you can say, well you can do this at home, and they're like, oh yeah, we could. (KC, June 15, 2011)

Classroom Practices and Procedures

The most important classroom routine or procedure identified by one ECE was the outdoor play period because of its many benefits. First, outdoor play allowed the children freedom to select their playmates. It provided space to engage in physical, active play. It encouraged creativity, innovation, and imagination as natural props and materials could be used in a multitude of ways. Last, it was a time when rich observations could be recorded. Two of the ECEs discussed the smaller groups within the whole group as having afforded the opportunity to get to know children better and to support children in learning to use the different spaces and materials in the room in appropriate ways. This arrangement had also supported the management of personalities and energy level combinations of the children. The daily routine was also identified as an important aspect of the children's experiences in that it provided children with predictability and was at the same time was responsive to the needs of the group. For example, there were longer outdoor play periods and extending free play periods when possible.

Influence of Content and Standards on Assessments

At the time this study was conducted, the program was not utilizing any particular documents or curriculum frameworks to guide curriculum activities and inform assessment activities. One ECE shared that the information reflected in her learning stories had changed during the study after reviewing the researcher's resources. In reviewing the learning story samples, she had commenced using learning outcomes as a means to communicate to readers the underlying learning and development occurring. ECEs were using the appendix outlining developmental outcomes from the Dale Shipley (2007) *Empowering Young Children* textbook resource to guide and support the identification of outcomes for stories.

The Program Administrator and one of the ECEs identified that the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised Edition* (ECERS-R) was used to support the set-up of the indoor play spaces and selection of materials, especially when major changes are made in redesigning the learning areas. They indicated that it was a helpful resource to ensure that equipment and materials were not overlooked. Two of the three ECEs did not feel knowledgeable about *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (DAP), while the third ECE indicated that she used DAP guidelines more than the ECERS-R resource to guide in the set-up of learning areas and activities.

When exploring with the ECEs the standards of practice and accountability in their roles and probed about the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* the Program Administrator and two ECEs (Canadian trained) stated they were aware of the standards, however, they did not utilize them as a resource in guiding their work with children. As to any particular curriculum approaches, two of the three identified the

Montessori approach with one ECE indicating that she had adopted some of the practices such as: stand back, observe, and systematically break down a task for teaching. There was some awareness of the *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care* as a result of joint professional development activities between the Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) of PEI and Early Childhood Care and Education New Brunswick (ECCENB). Consequently, two of the three ECEs had participated in professional development sessions.

Teaching Practices

The *Helping Model*³ for guiding and supporting pro-social behaviour was discussed as a teaching strategy that one ECE favoured. She shared her disbelief that children could be guided through a process to solve a problem between two children. In learning how to use this approach, she came to favour this process and used it as a means to assess what children are capable of in their social interactions. The child development theorists, Piaget and Vygotsky, were identified by two of the three ECEs as theorists they recalled from their training programs. The third ECE expressed she would find a refresher course on the theorists helpful and had limited knowledge of the Vygotskian theory.

The concept of *scaffolding* was identified; however, none of the ECEs were aware of the concept of *dynamic assessment*. Dynamic assessment, or instructional experiment, is a process that considers the child's zone of proximal development in terms of skills mastered and the skills he or she are experiencing frustration or difficulty with that

³ The Helping Model is a conflict resolution process to used by ECEs to support children through situations of conflict and promote prosocial skills.

informs the teacher on the instructional steps needed to encourage further learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). The ECEs were observed on numerous occasions, during observations, scaffolding the children's learning. Although the term *scaffold* was used by ECEs in discussions, in reflecting on work with the children, their knowledge of sociocultural theory was limited as was their ability to articulate the application of sociocultural theory. Their understanding and practices of developmental theorists seemed effortless as compared to articulating their understanding of sociocultural theory. The following ECE quote points to the importance and role of documentation to support deeper reflection of theoretical influences:

I think part of your training really kind of puts it into your brain, but you don't consciously think about it every single day, especially when you're involved in a routine . . . you don't separate yourself that way, you just kind of do it. . . . I think that's where documentation comes from cause it makes you rethink every time you write or every time you read it, you're thinking about that situation . . . (KC, June 15, 2011)

In supporting ECEs to greater reflection and application of sociocultural theory, the act of documentation offers potential as a means to make visible the cultural and social influences on children's development and learning.

The Journals

The journals that ECEs maintained after the observation and interview highlighted three different reflective practice approaches and provided another glimpse into each ECE's assessment practices. ECEs maintained the journals for a one month period with the number of entries ranging from eight to fourteen in that time period. Journal entries

included reflections on: (a) communication with parents; (b) teachable moments to complete assessments; (c) the impact of the graduation event on the children and assessment information used to support particular children through the experience; (d) learning story notes; (e) record of conversations between children for learning story construction; (f) reflection on communication with parents of the portfolio and children's readiness for kindergarten; and (g) discussions with co-workers and administration about knowledge of children, changes to group composition and space management.

Journal entries provided samples of each ECE's style of written reflection with two of the three demonstrating a preference for this type of documentation. The third ECE recorded brief highlights and elements of observations that reflected seeing new dispositions in the children with whom she had established relationships and looking for information on new children who had transitioned into the program. In her opening entry, a great deal of insight is reflected about the overwhelming nature of observations that could be recorded and validated the benefits of a framework and structure to conduct focused observations. *I find that some days so many things are happening I'm not sure what to record for their files* (LM Journal, June 24, 2011). The quote also reflects the big picture, whole group view this ECE used in her work and role within the ECE team.

During observations, she was the ECE to ensure that supplies for the Mother's Day gifts were purchased and ensured that every child painted a pot, planted the flowers and was in tune to the energy levels of the whole group to adjust the daily routine and play periods.

The journal of one ECE captured her reflections on the discussion with other team members about a child they were concerned about who's behaviour had become aggressive with the other children.

In talking to LM about this, I said it was interesting because when I went through the course, we learned about the hierarchy of needs, we learned about ways to deal with conflict, behaviour, etc. (i.e., redirection, natural consequences), but looking back it just covered the basics. I could be wrong but I don't remember going in depth in learning strategies for the behaviours that require something more. (CM, July 20, 2012)

We worked on the computer yesterday to find 'needs.' I was thinking Maslow's hierarchy of needs but we knew there another and found Glasser's five needs. We asked ourselves 'What need is not being met?' It was a great discussion among ourselves including [Program Administrator]. (CM, July 21, 2012)

In discussing this situation together and sharing their collective understanding about the child, they uncovered a major change in his relationships and playmates that could be a factor in his behaviour. Armed with this knowledge, the intervention was modified and at the same time theoretical knowledge exchanged among the ECEs. The journals provided rich examples of learning stories in development including different documentation processes such as scribing children's conversations and capturing children's dispositions, interests, and curiosities.

The Focus Group

The focus group meeting held with the Program Administrator and three ECEs was used to confirm interview transcripts, discuss on-going developments in their assessment practices, and review their experiences in the study. The discussion was

animated and spontaneous. All research participants indicated that the transcript reflected the interview discussion. Two of the ECEs indicated that they found the questions to be complex, proposing that clear, concise questions would have enabled them to have provided clear concise answers. They recalled losing their train of thought and felt that clear concise questions and access to the questions in advance would have enabled clear and comprehensive answers. One ECE felt strongly that her answers would have been different had the questions been simplified; another conceded that the complex questions had been asked in chunks and therefore could not say that her answers would change. The Program Administrator shared that if she had received the questions in advance she would have felt compelled to research the answers.

ECEs shared that the interview questions served many purposes. To begin, the interview questions prompted discussion within the team. The interview questions also fostered the gathering of information on the cultural backgrounds of the children, and directed the information gathering on the new children that had transitioned into the preschool group. The addition of small digital cameras and journal resources provided accessible resources to collect and record observational information. The portfolio resources had been moved into the playroom in an accessible area for ECEs and children. The ECE who had previously felt overwhelmed and overloaded with information indicated that having a streamlined process helped to manage and prioritize observational information. The journals prompted the recording of more information, which could be used to develop rich learning narratives and running record data. One ECE pointed out that she was *taking advantage of time* when she could conduct observations and document on *inside days* and another felt that the outdoor play period offered more

opportunity to conduct observations. There was a brief discussion about the use of ECE personal iPhones for videotaping and capturing digital photographs. The ethical considerations and securing data in a confidential manner would require further discussion and policy development at the program level. The Centre owner was in the process of developing a website for secure communication with parents.

The dialogue moved to exploring how they would organize themselves, the children, and the space for the fall program, and it became a time to collectively plan and brainstorm . Would they return to small groups to manage personalities and energy levels of the children or keep an open format? One ECE expressed how much she missed a planning process, sharing with the others the use of a white board planning process, where children's interests are tracked to provision activities and materials for the children's exploration of the topic. Another ECE wondered if they needed to implement planning boards, as used in the *High Scope Curriculum* approach for the children to have some control over their choice of play areas. The conversation was open and jovial with reference to their different personalities and communication styles they had become aware of with each other when they completed the Insights® training. They were asking of each other in an effort to get to know the new children. The details of their discussion indicated that the children's portfolio resource had contributed to their knowledge of the children.

KC proposed that for the fall program, the developmental checklists be completed in October to provide a baseline and again in March. She also proposed that in the interim learning stories and work samples be collected and stored in the children's portfolios. The ECEs discussed how the learning stories compiled had provided insight about children

were being overlooked. The group agreed that both processes were necessary to help focus observations and support prioritization of learning story documentation to reflect children's learning and development.

In closing the focus group debriefing, the Program Administrator asked her preschool team *If they were glad to have participated in the research?* LM indicated that things were brought to her attention, and she became more aware. KC indicated that participation in the study helped her to work with the team in a different way than she may had as new team member. LC explained that it had changed the way she constructed her learning stories. CM had no regrets and felt the research had brought a lot of awareness to what she was doing and why she did the things she did. She had completed her first learning story documentation during the study and felt more informed on what to observe and what to document in her observations.

The focus group debrief reflection of the ECE teams experience in the study opened discussion to their development as a team, appreciation for each ones individuality, contribution, and unique talents. One ECE led the dialogue to a deeper discussion and debate on the structure of their day, proposed planning processes in order to engage deeper in the collection of observational data to inform planning of curriculum activities and enhance formative assessment data.

Summary of Case Study Data Collection

The data collected in the case study through the observations, researcher notations, semi-structured interviews, participant journals, and debriefing focus group provided a lens into the early learning assessment practices of one ECE team. The data supported that attention was given to assessment of children's development and learning

coupled with an interest to access current assessment training, resources, and supports. The assessment practices conducted at the beginning of the study reflected the development of a rudimentary portfolio with samples of children's art work and a developmental checklist. The ECEs and Program Administrator indicated that the assessment methods were established to inform parents of children transitioning to kindergarten and posed an opportunity to develop portfolio documents across all age groups. The ECE team member new to the preschool team at the time of the study did not complete the developmental checklists and was using learning narratives as a medium to document the children's interests, learning, and development. The interest and exploration of learning story narratives to document children's learning and development provided an avenue for the researcher and other ECE participants to engage in professional learning.

The differing images of children's capabilities as addressed in the literature review emerged with the ECEs move toward the development of learning narratives with the children. The journal entries and narrative samples produced by two of the ECE participants during this period reflected deeper engagement in the assessment of children's learning using the learning narrative medium for documentation and reflection of significant play explorations. The ECE participants identified the benefits and limitations of the developmental checklist and through exploration of learning story narratives found an avenue to reflect formative assessment.

The ECEs were interested in moving forward with their assessment practices during the study period. The children's rest period and outdoor play periods were used as times to support each other, collaborate, reflect, and document assessment data. The

access to technological resources (e.g., laptop computer and digital cameras) and organization of time during the day provided the ECEs interested in learning narratives the time to complete the documentation. The study raised awareness for the ECEs and supported decision making. Participating in the study prioritized time for assessment and documentation opportunities within their day. Also, ECEs' participation in the study help them in planning activities and provisioning for a rich learning environment. Lastly, through involvement in the research, ECE were enabled clarify the role of assessment in supporting children's learning and development. The ECE team expressed interest in accessing additional support and training on assessment methods and updated theoretical information.

The study illuminated that the ECE team through their experiences in the preschool program were moving toward formative assessment practices to document using authentic methods children's learning and development. Through this case study of one ECE team, many elements of the literature review were evident. To begin, the balance between ECE-directed and child-initiated facilitation of activities were documented both in the literature review and in this study. The differing images of the children's capabilities were expressed as the ECEs reflected upon their images children and role in teaching. The tensions experienced by ECEs with competing theories (emergent, constructivist, social efficiency, and behaviourist) as ECEs reflected on their training and knowledge of different theorists and expressed the need for more information on sociocultural theory. The socially constructed nature of learning and influence on development became more apparent as ECEs explored and expanded on the

learning story narrative approach. The documented evidence of formative and authentic assessment practices, and formative assessment methods utilized.

This close up view into assessment practices by ECEs within a preschool program raises questions as to whether this is also happening in other early learning programs. Are other ECEs experiencing similar understandings and misunderstandings about assessment? Are other ECEs motivated to develop their assessment competencies and capabilities with young children?

Online Questionnaire

Case study data were enriched with data from the online questionnaire and cross referenced the themes that emerged. The online questionnaire addressed the questions:

- 1) What is the perceived role of child assessment in programs offered in an early years centre?
- 2) To what extent do ECEs attend to the assessment of young children's learning and development?

The 64 electronic invitations distributed to Program Administrators across PEI resulted in a 36% ($N=23$) response rate to the online questionnaire. In the selection of role titles provided, 87% ($n=20$) of the respondents indicated they were a Director/Supervisor, 22% ($n=5$) selected Program Administrator, and 43% ($n=10$) indicated they were owners. The educational credentials of respondents reflected a diversity of educational credentials with the majority 52% ($n=12$) achieving an ECE diploma, 17% ($n=4$) ECE certificate,

and 31% ($n=7$) holding degrees in Child & Youth studies, Social Sciences, unidentified Master's Degrees and Human Services diploma with ECE certification. The years of service as Program Administrator, Director or Supervisor ranged from less than two years to 21 years or more with 39% ($n= 9$) indicating more than 16 years in their roles (See Figure 4.6).


Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Less than 2 years		9%	2
2- 5 years		22%	5
5-10 years		22%	5
11-15 years		17%	4
16-20 years		9%	2
21 years or more		22%	5
Total Responses			23

Figure 4.6 Questionnaire respondents years of service

Assessment of learning and development. In response to the aspects of children's learning and development assessed, 70% ($n=16$) of Program Administrators indicated that both development and learning dispositions were assessed. Assessment of developmental domains was selected by 13% ($n=3$) respondents; 17 % ($n=4$) indicating

no assessment was conducted; and 0 % selecting learning dispositions as the primary area assessed. Respondents' selections indicate that assessing children's learning dispositions and developmental domains are a significant focus for assessments, followed by assessment of developmental domains.

Respondents were asked to indicate how significant each of the following activities were in their programs as reasons to assess children's learning and development: (a) accountability; (b) planning curriculum activities; (c) documenting activities, (d) documenting transition to kindergarten, (e) sharing information with parents, and (f) sharing information with other professionals. Twenty-three respondents answered three of the six items in this question, which were accountability, sharing information with parents, sharing information with other professionals. One respondent declined to answer the items for planning curriculum activities, documenting activities, and documenting the transition to kindergarten. Respondents' responses were selected from a five-point Likert scale with number one indicating a feeling of *what they must do* and number five *what was the most meaningful* reason to complete the activity. Accountability scored in the midrange ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.33$). Documenting transitions to kindergarten ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.67$), and sharing information with other professionals ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.48$) scored mid- toward high range. Subsequently, responses to planning for curriculum ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.86$), documenting activities ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 1.03$) and sharing information with parents ($M = 4.87$, $SD = 0.29$) were at the upper end of the scale, 'What I (we) feel is most meaningful to do' (See Table 4.1).

Using a six-point Likert, scale respondents were asked to comment on the frequency ECEs in their program documented assessment of children's development with

(a) one indicating only when they were concerned about a child; (b) two indicating assess but not as often as they like; (c) three indicating assessed at least two times a year; (d) four indicating assessed monthly; (e) five indicating assessed at least once weekly; and (f) six indicating not assessed at this time. Mean averages indicate documented assessment of children's development at least two times per year in cognitive thinking & language ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.80$), cognitive thinking & numeracy ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.77$), physical gross motor ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.73$), physical fine motor ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.77$), social ($M = 3.0$, $SD = 1.91$), and spiritual or moral ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.86$). The creative ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 2.11$) and emotional ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.66$) domains fell under the 3.0 range reflecting they are not assessed as often. Twenty-three respondents completed this question with the exception of *emotional domain* where there were twenty-two responses. It is interesting to note, that at the beginning of the questionnaire, when respondents were asked if they assessed learning and development, four respondents indicated that they did not, however when asked to identify the frequency that developmental domains were documented and assessed, one respondent rather than four (which in a previous question four respondents indicated no assessment was conducted), indicated no assessment was conducted. These results reflect confusion with the term *assessment*, which was also encountered in the case study observations. (See Table 4.2)

Table 4.1

Reasons for Assessing Children's Development and Learning

	1 (What I/we feel I/we have to do)	2	3	4	5 (What I/we feel is most meaningful to do)	Total
Accountability— proof for others	5 (22%)	3 (13%)	6 (26%)	6 (26%)	3 (13%)	23
Planning curriculum activities	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	3 (14%)	7 (32%)	11 (50%)	22
Documenting Activities	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	7 (32%)	13 (59%)	22
Documenting transition to kindergarten	3 (14%)	2 (9%)	7 (32%)	5 (23%)	5 (23%)	22
Sharing information with parents	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	4 (17%)	18 (78%)	23
Sharing information with other professionals	3 (13%)	1 (4%)	3 (13%)	11 (48%)	5 (22%)	23

Table 4.2

Documented Assessment of Children's Development

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Cognitive thinking & language.	2 (9%)	6 (26%)	7 (30%)	3 (13%)	4 (17%)	1 (4%)	23
Cognitive thinking & numeracy	2 (9%)	6 (26%)	8 (35%)	2 (9%)	4 (17%)	1 (4%)	23
Physical gross motor	2 (9%)	5 (22%)	9 (39%)	3 (13%)	3 (13%)	1 (4%)	23
Physical fine motor	3 (13%)	4 (17%)	8 (35%)	4 (17%)	3 (13%)	1 (4%)	23
Emotional	4 (18%)	4 (18%)	8 (36%)	4 (18%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	22
Social	4 (17%)	4 (17%)	8 (35%)	3 (13%)	3 (13%)	1 (4%)	23
Spiritual /Moral	4 (17%)	4 (17%)	5 (22%)	3 (13%)	1 (4%)	6 (26%)	23
Creative	3 (13%)	6 (26%)	9 (39%)	1 (4%)	3 (13%)	1 (4%)	23

Case study questions were developed to determine the prevalence of learning dispositions and interpretation of observational data. The assessment of learning

dispositions is closely linked to the ECEs understanding of sociocultural, developmental, and behaviourist theories and application of emergent curriculum approaches. When respondents were provided a case study question that contained safety concerns and opportunity to indicate responsive care to foster learning dispositions, 21% ($n=5$) selected questions relating to the safety aspect of the scenario and 78% ($n=18$) focused foremost on the opportunity to foster learning dispositions. In the 21% indicating safety concerns, 17% ($n=4$) also acknowledge the children's initiative and 4% ($n=1$) acknowledge the safety issue and intervention to change behaviour. Respondents' answers indicated awareness of the importance in fostering learning dispositions and provisioning for the child's needs, however, answers did not confirm that this is actually the practice (See Figure 4.7).

Reflect on interests the following case scenario and identify what assessments you or your staff would make for the situation. It has been raining for several days and the children have not been able to play outside. The afternoon play is loud, and the children are full of energy as they explore the different learning areas. The three Early childhood educators are busy adding materials to the environment to sustain the children's interests and mediating interactions. Two boys (three and four years old) have noticed the rain outside and want a better look. They stack two stools on top of each other and are climbing up just as you notice what they are doing. How do you assess this situation and react? Check the statement that would most apply to you and/or your staff.	
17 % ($n=4$)	I see the safety concern first and address it and then consider they have taken responsibility to address their interest.
78% ($n=18$)	I note they are taking an interest in the rain outside and that they have used persistence and problem solving skills to gain access to the windows. I consider how the ECE team and I can give them access to explore the rain outside.
4% ($n=1$)	I see the safety issue and have the boys stand on one stool explaining my concerns about them falling with the two stools stacked.

Figure 4.7. Interpreting observations from case study example #1

In the second case study question (See Figure 4.8) posed, respondents were again asked to select the answer most closely associated with their assessment and response in how they would interpret the observation. Respondents were almost evenly split between two answers wherein 52% ($n=12$) selected the answer indicating they would document the child's problem solving skills and demonstration of respect whereas 43% ($n=10$) acknowledge the child's skills and intervene to direct actions. The differing responses indicated the complexity and differences associated with interpretation of observations and illuminate the different roles the ECE may take either in *action-of* or *in action-on*.

Through discussion with my supervisor an interesting question arose as to whether differences in responses were related to the demographics of the respondents. The analysis of the data generated by the questionnaire for the two scenario questions (See Figure 4.7 and Figure 4.8) were cross tabulated with the demographic question 12 (level of certification) and question 13 (years of service). It is interesting to note that for scenario question 4 (See Figure 4.7) three individuals certified at the early childhood diploma level and one of the two individuals certified at the masters level identified the safety concerns with 16 respondents with an ECE diploma or ECE certificate selecting the indicator recognizing the learning dispositions. In the cross tabulation with the second scenario question 8 (See Figure 4.8) the analysis of the data generated by the questionnaire did not demonstrate the same result respondents at both the ECE diploma and Master level selected the two indicators that recognized learning dispositions and in the second response the disposition and opportunity to scaffold the child's problem solving skills. Therefore it would seem that level of education does not determine

response. When both scenario questions were analysed through cross tabulation with

<p>Reflect on the following case scenario and identify what assessments you or your staff would make for the situation. Ryan is an active high energy 4.5 year old who likes to be on the move. Outdoor play time is a favourite time in his day. He loves digging in the sand and driving the dump truck around the yard to dump a load of sand. On this day he is taking his sand to the cement pad an area that the ECE team has decided needs to be kept clean for wheel toys and bouncing balls. Ryan is asked to move the piles of sand back to the sand area; he obliges without argument and starts to carry the sand one scoop at a time. After three trips he reconsiders and looks around the yard for a pail that will hold more sand, which he fills and removes the remaining sand. Then he returns to the sand area to play with the dump truck once more. How would you interpret this observation? Check the statement that would most apply to you and/or your staff.</p>	
4% (n=1)	I note Ryan's interest in moving the sand from one place to another.
52% (n=12)	I document his problem solving skills to secure a pail that will hold more sand than the scoop and willingness to respect the limit.
0%	I consider Ryan's persistence in solving a difficulty or uncertainty.
43% (n=10)	I acknowledge Ryan has taken responsibility to remove the sand and still maintain his interest. I problem solve with him acceptable locations to move the sand between and thank him for his cooperation.

years of service there were no significant trends identified.

Figure 4.8 Interpreting observations from case study #2

Assessment processes. In order to determine the formative assessment processes that may be used in conducting assessments with children in early learning programs, the Program Administrators were asked to rate the following formative assessment processes used by ECE staff in their program: (a) interpreting observations, (b) authentic assessment practices, (c) learning story assessments, and (d) portfolio documentation and rubric assessment. Rating choices were as follows: (a) one indicated more information and training is needed to use this process; (b) two indicated they were exploring how to use this process; (c) three indicated they were comfortable using this process; (d) four

indicated they able to mentor others in how to use this process; and (e) five indicated they were not interested in this process. This question was completed by 22 of the questionnaire respondents indicating that one respondent chose to abstain from answering.

The mean averages and standard deviations for this question indicate respondents range between exploring how to use this process with interpreting observations showing the most movement toward comfortable using the process the results are as follow: interpreting observations ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.47$); authentic assessment practices ($M = 2.09$, $SD = 1.68$); learning story assessments ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 0.47$); and portfolio documentation and rubric ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 0.51$). The results in this question indicated that a very limited number of the respondents felt they could mentor others, and no one indicated they were not interested in using any of the processes. (See Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

Assessment Processes and Practices

	1 More information & training	2 Exploring how to use	3 Comfortable with this	4 Able to mentor others	5 No interest in this	Total
Interpreting observations	1 (5%)	6 (27%)	13 (59%)	2 (9%)	0 (0%)	22
Authentic assessment practice	6 (27%)	10 (45%)	4 (18%)	2 (9%)	0 (0%)	22
Learning story assessments	2 (9%)	13 (59%)	6 (27%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	22
Portfolio documentation & rubric assessment	1 (5%)	11 (50%)	9 (41%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	22

In order to determine the range and variety of assessment tools or methods utilized, additional information was gleaned asking Program Administrators to identify whether they use them with: (a) one indicating do not use each particular tool; (b) two indicating they do not have; (c) three indicating they have not been trained to use the tool; (d) four do not use because it is not well developed; (e) five use it only when concerned about a child; and (f) use all of the time. The use of rubric assessments ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.46$) according to respondents answers is impeded, because they did not have the resource. Responses for developmental checklist ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.86$) and portfolio resource ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.48$) indicate that these resources are not used, because they were not well developed. Narrative progress reports ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 2.14$) as an assessment tool were impacted, because they had not been trained to use it. Respondents indicated using Observations ($M = 5.71$, $SD = 0.70$) and Parent feedback ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.07$) when they were concerned about a child's development (See Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

Assessment Tools Used to Monitor Children's Learning and Development

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
	Do not use	Do not have	Have not been trained to use it	Do not use because it is not well developed	Use when concerned about a child	Use all the time	
Developmental Checklists	3 (14%)	3 (14%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (38%)	7 (33%)	21
Observations	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	3 (14%)	17 (81%)	21
Rubric Assessments	4 (19%)	9 (43%)	4 (19%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	2 (10%)	21

Portfolio resource	2 (9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (18%)	5 (23%)	11 (50%)	22
Parent feedback	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (14%)	18 (82%)	22
Narrative progress reports	8 (36%)	2 (9%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	4 (18%)	6 (27%)	22

Promising Supports and Respondent Open Comments

Respondents ($n=23$) were asked to identify the frequency that supports were provided to facilitate assessment of children's learning and development using a Likert type scale with (a) one indicating never; (b) two indicating about twice a year; (c) three indicating once a month; (d) four indicating every other week most of the time; and (e) five indicating weekly most of the time. Team teaching ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.33$), and providing access to information technology ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.20$) were identified as supports provided every other week most of the time. Providing ECE staff with dedicated paid time away ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 2.46$) from responsibilities with children to interpret and document children's learning and development were identified as occurring on average once a month.

Respondents were asked to provide any recommendations in relation to early learning assessment practices for decision makers and leaders in the early childhood sector, and 48% ($n=11$) provided comments. Respondents' recommendations were categorized as; (a) time and funding for ECE to be out of ratio to complete assessment and planning activities; (b) providing a standard tool; (c) reminder of the importance of providing children with opportunities to play perceiving assessment activities as all sit down work; and (d) urging decision makers to make the necessary decision to identify

what they want. Respondents' recommendations for ECE time away from the children to complete assessment activities and planning ranged from two to five hours a week (See Table 4.5).

Table 4.5

Respondent Recommendations

Recommendation	Respondents
More funding to provide staffing for more observation and documentation and planning time.	n=11
I think more money and time need to be put into allow the educators to document and use early learning assessment practices. For picture taking and documentation, I believe the resources need to be made available to the educators.	
Staff need to be out of ratios 2-3 hours per week to carry out documentation	
I am looking forward to having a standard assessment tool implemented by all early years centres. Once an assessment tool is chosen training will be needed in order for it to be successful.	
Time is the biggest challenge. The educators in my program get about an hour a week (while in the nap room) to document and plan. It's not nearly enough but it's the only time we can carve out. They would love to have extra paid planning time	
Time is always an issue. The ECE needs more time for assessing, compiling and completing documentation. One hour of planning time a week is not nearly enough to cover all of our assessment responsibilities for each individual child. I would suggest a system where the ECE works a 7 hours day with the children and 1 hour of planning time each day.	
Always remembering that a child's play is there work. Children are not "Little Adults". They need time and space to discover the world around them and it is always our duty to ensure that they are given optimal time to allow for this to occur.	
We are starting to all be on the same page on assessment. Decision makers need to invest more money for educators to be off the floor doing assessments/documentations.	
This takes time away from children, knowing this is important BUT keeping children happy and well cared for within our ratio can be challenging... we need more staffing hours to make this work	

Summary

In triangulating the data and cross referencing with the literature review, case study data, and online questionnaire data, three broad themes emerged. There was confusion about what constituted assessment, when assessments occurred and the reasons for assessment (assessment of what and why should one assess). In the case study several formative assessment methods and practices were documented. This was also substantiated by the variety of formative assessment methods reported by respondents in the online questionnaire and (authentic assessment methods and tools). Lastly, the professional growth documented by the ECE team in the case study demonstrates the significance of engaging ECEs in learning opportunities through exploration and application within their day-to-day work (professional learning and development). The case study data revealed the different assessment methods an ECE team used, at times confounded, with how to effectively utilize the tool while dealing with theoretical conflicts. Preferences for different methods are reflective of the theoretical continuum and influences from prior training. The study provided insight into the assessment methods within an early years centre, practices by a team of ECEs with preschool children and the ECEs' experiences with the complexities associated with assessment. The case study data were enriched with the findings gleaned from the responses of 36 % ($n=23$) of Program Administrator-Supervisors across the province of Prince Edward Island who completed the online questionnaire.

The case study and online questionnaire pointed out confusion and tensions with what to assess and the why should one assess. The case study and online questionnaire results reflected an ease with the assessment of children's development for purposes of

planning activities and reporting to parents. In the online questionnaire, respondents' answers indicated awareness of the importance in fostering learning dispositions and provisioning for interests, however, answers could not confirm that this was actually the practice. At the onset of the case study with the ECE team, developmental checklists formed the basis of their assessment practices. The interest in other assessment methods and engagement to explore other tools pointed toward a balanced approach on the assessment of development and learning.

In the case study, assessments were conducted using developmental checklists to provide a report to parents of children transitioning to kindergarten. The parent conference during the case study exploration provided a glimpse of one parent's confusion and concerns in regard to the summative assessment (*Early Years Evaluation-Direct Assessment* a universal screening process before kindergarten entry) conducted with her child and the relationship with assessment data communicated by the ECE from an early learning program. The parent expressed interest in understanding and affirming her child's academic skills, learning strengths and overall readiness for kindergarten. In the online questionnaire, 95% ($n=22$) of respondents indicated that the most meaningful reason to conduct assessment was to share information with parents. The literature review uncovered the importance of parents involvement in the assessment of children's learning and development. Further research and development is required to support ECEs in uncovering how to effectively involve parents and children in the assessment processes with authentic methods offering promise. The ECE team and online questionnaire results clearly expressed both an interest and desire to have access to training. Training needs

were identified to support a deeper understanding of the breadth and scope of assessment and variety of methods to support articulation within authentic assessment practices.

In the case study, the ECE team became engaged in a professional learning and development experience. The ECE team identified limitations with the developmental checklist, which facilitated moving into the exploration of learning narratives. The ECEs embraced the opportunity to explore and develop assessment practices and discovering multiple perspectives to document and record children's learning and development. The articulation of learning and meaningful play experiences for the children enabled the expression of children's capabilities. This awareness and shift in thinking provided the ECEs with an avenue to reflect the depth and breadth of a children learning and development and was not confined or limited by checklist descriptors. The portfolio resources were enriched and moving toward a compilation of learning narratives, and artifacts that provided greater depth on the children learning and development than the checklist on its own, thus creating authentic portraits of the children. The analysis of the data and report of the study findings created a portrait reflecting the depth and dimensions possible in the assessment practices of ECEs in addition to the complexities, confusions and tensions.

Chapter Five: Discussion

In this chapter, a discussion of the themes that emerged in the research findings and triangulation of data, between the case study conducted with the preschool team in an Early Years Centre (EYC) and an online questionnaire distributed to Program Administrators of licensed early learning programs across the province of Prince Edward Island (PEI) is presented. The case study included: (a) 20 hours of observations with 3 early childhood educators (ECEs); (b) one 60-minute semi-structured interviews with the Program Administrator and three ECEs; (c) analysis of ECE journals; and (d) 60 minute debrief focus group. The online questionnaire was sent to 64 programs licensed by the Child Care Facilities Board of PEI and was representative of government designated early years centres (EYCs) and private programs with, 23 respondents completing the online questionnaire.

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore the current assessment practices of early childhood educators (ECEs) and the assessment processes found within early learning programs of young children's learning and development. Early learning pedagogy and assessment practices have been highlighted to ECEs in Prince Edward Island (PEI) early learning centers. Focus and attention on this area of early learning and care have a risen from increased financial investments provincially and federally. Also, the development of new curriculum frameworks has intensified a need for ECEs to refocus on assessment practices and the development and implementation of summative and formative monitoring systems. Furthermore with the development of educational programs to

increase the credentials of ECEs, greater focus has been devoted to effective assessment practices. ECEs have traditionally used observation as a means to determine and monitor children's development and temperament towards learning. Their interpretation and documentation of children's development and learning has been based on knowledge of child development and prevalent child development theory.

Government investment in early learning and childcare in PEI is an extension of political good will expressed through the increased funding to the early childhood sector with the goal of moving from a sector designation to the development as a public education system. The interest and involvement of early childhood advocates, educational leaders, and researchers has increased with a variety of perspectives and methodologies competing. The rights of society's youngest citizens to quality care, education, and play are mired in debates about readiness for school, increasing the numeracy and literacy skills of society, and, on the other hand, the tug of war to focus on the non-structured qualities of healthy childhood. All perspectives are founded with the best of intentions and within historical patterns posing conflicts and tensions, however, it also offered for ECEs the opportunity to demonstrate, through their assessment practices, the importance and legitimate pedagogical approaches within which young children thrive.

The development and implementation of summative monitoring systems to universally screen four-year-old children in particular, illuminates a gap in formative and authentic assessment data. The contemporary debates raise awareness of early childhood pedagogical practices that highlight *meaning making* rather than *enculturation*, moving dialogue and collaboration away from deficit-based assessment toward competency-based assessment practices. It can be argued that summative monitoring procedures

provide for assessment of narrow bodies of knowledge and are difficult to achieve valid results as they are affected by children's emotional states and the conditions of the assessment (Epstein, Schweinhart, DeBruin-Parecki & Robin, 2004). Yelland, Lee, O'Rourke, and Harrison (2008) cautioned " Early assessment using standardized measures can shift the focus of both pedagogy and curriculum to homogeneity and result in difference being seen as problematic rather than an opportunity for new learning and ways of understanding" (p. 108).

Research documents the factors of dynamic and inconsistent development young children exhibit, the influences of sociocultural experiences, and the environment as factors of serious consideration in the development of assessment methods (Bagnato, 2007; Bodrova, Leong & Shore, 2004; Carr, 2001; Dunphy, 2010). Many people would promote that the most appropriate and valid assessment method with young children are authentic assessment practices where children are observed and assessed within their natural environments while engaged in care and play activities (Bagnato, 2007; Carr, 2001; Dunphy 2010; Grisham-Brown, Hallam & Brookshire, 2006; Meisels, Xiaoli, & Beachy-Quick, 2010). This research study reflected that ECEs had a unique role and opportunity to use observation data collected during children's engagement in classroom activities and routines, conducted over a period of time, to create and reflect an authentic portrait of children's learning and development. This research study set out to explore these issues guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What is the perceived role of child assessment in programs offered in an early years centre?

- 2) To what extent do early learning programs attend to the assessment of young children's learning and development?
- 3) To what extent do early childhood educators attend to the assessment of young children's learning and development?

The discussion is organized according to the research questions. Research data collected through the case study and from the online questionnaire is presented outlining the triangulated themes: (a) what is assessed and why; (b) assessment tools and methods; and (c) professional learning and development. Following a discussion of the themes, study recommendations and limitations are provided and then followed by considerations for further research.

What is Assessment?

This section of the discussion will address findings for question number one and also provide introductory elements for questions two and three. The perception of assessment and its importance was reflected at the onset of the case study, through the initial reaction and anxiety expressed by one ECE, that the researcher would not observe her using appropriate assessment methods. As the inquiry progressed and data collection occurred, this ECE became more aware of the variety of methods and means used to assess children's learning and development. At the onset of the study, the ECEs were utilizing a developmental skills checklist developed by another early learning program. This developmental skills checklist raised awareness to the skill areas that children required more opportunity to develop and also raised questions with regard to what should be assessed. After using the checklist, some ECEs questioned the developmental appropriateness of some items. One of the three ECEs indicated that prior to conducting

the observations to complete the developmental skill checklist, she had assumed many of the children could do or perform the skills ,but, upon more careful observation and documentation, discovered they were not always able. The participating ECE team indicated that the developmental skill checklist had informed skill development curriculum activities and experiences to promote through play activities in the classroom and daily routine.

In the online questionnaire, the term *assessment* created confusion, with two of the four respondents indicating that they did not conduct assessments; however, in another question, the number of respondents increased, indicating they did conduct assessments of the various developmental domains. The assessment and identification of developmental delays or skill deficits has been a long-standing purpose of and reason for assessment as a means to intervene and remediate. The ECE role has been to identify significant developmental delays or concern for further assessment and identification of interventions by other professionals such as pediatric speech language pathologists, physiotherapists, etc.

ECEs also identified limitations with the developmental checklist in that it did not reflect all aspects of children's learning and reflect progress over time. This was most apparent with a particular child who had made significant gains with regulation of behavior and progress in all areas of his development, however, this issue was not reflected in the checklist. In order to capture the child's progress, the use of learning narratives as an assessment tool enabled the ECE to present evidence and document authentically.

The current movement and influence of constructivist, emergent theories create tension and confusion with behaviourist, social efficiency theories and practices in scientific measurement of behaviour (Schrio, 2008; Shepard, 2000). The movement of early childhood into education jurisdictions within Canada and in other countries such as New Zealand and Australia, affords opportunities to consider pedagogical approaches with young children (birth to eight years) and, subsequently, the appropriate assessment practices. The development and implementation of curriculum frameworks for use by parents, ECEs, and caregivers as a means to structure and articulate the learning and development of young children promote and support several assessment methods including both formative and authentic assessment methods. The formative assessment methods promoted in the curriculum frameworks provide users with a means to document children's learning and development, however, ECEs from this case study and the Program Administrators through the online questionnaire identified a need for more training with authentic assessment tools and practices.

The primary purpose in conducting the developmental skill checklists, portfolios and parent conferences as indicated by ECE research participants was to provide information to parents that would support the child's transition from kindergarten into the public education system or identify children with developmental concerns or risks. The opportunity to observe the dialogue and information sharing that unfolded in the parent conference with the ECE, LM illuminated areas of importance to the parent, the limitations of the data used, and the child's interest in wanting to attend the meeting. The experience of the ECE for the meeting and provisions prior to the meeting for communication between the ECE and parent had been limited. The parent posed a

number of questions to the ECE relating to her child's experience with the *Early Years Evaluation-Direct Assessment* (EYE-DA) assessment tool and communication protocol that the ECE was unable to address. The parents' experience and inquiry about the EYE-DA assessment raises the importance of professional collaboration and communication of assessment protocols to enable ECEs and kindergarten teachers to appropriately address parents' questions and to understand the scope of assessment protocols. As an aside, the implementation of the *Ages and Stages* questionnaire administered by Health PEI has occurred post-study and would also benefit from collaboration and a communication protocol with the ECE sector.

As the study unfolded and learning story narratives were explored (lead by the newest ECE team member with novice experience in this method), a transformation began. The team moved toward collaborative discussions of observations and perspectives to determine the support and intervention needs of individual children experiencing difficulty. The successful collaboration and dialogue as recorded by one ECE in her journal, led the ECE team to explore, to a greater extent, the purposes of assessment and variety of methods to support formative assessment documentation and reflections that included development, learning, and further inquiry to extend children's play experiences.

In the case study exploration, the ECEs were able to see the role of both the developmental checklist and learning narratives and uncover the potential of documentation and the portfolio resources as multiple methods of representing both learning and development gathered by the ECE. The potential of the learning narratives, documentation display, and portfolio resources to engage and involve parents in the

assessment process was relatively limited and involvement of children with these discovered as a result of time and child-staff ratio constraints preventing time away from responsibilities with the children. The transformation occurring with each of the ECE team members in their exploration of assessment methods such as the learning narratives and critical analysis of the developmental skills checklist, made visible interest in and areas for further training. The utilization of learning narratives with focused training in Carr's (2001) *learning story approach* provides an avenue for meaningful parent engagement and involvement serving as a deeper analysis, multiple perspective and co-construction of learning. The documentation of children's thinking, leaning, and demonstration of representative abilities and strong metacognitive skills have been an aspect of Reggio inspired programs fostering the engagement and involvement of parents (Gandini, 2011).

The case study highlighted the perceived role of assessment in the ECEs day-to-day practices, a parental perspective on the early learning programs assessment information, and the links to the EYE-DA assessment. The professional development engendered through the study opened the ECEs to the breadth and depth of assessment procedures and purposes. In the online questionnaire, 18 of 23 respondents indicated that *sharing information with parents* was a significant reason for assessing children's learning and development (See Table 4.2.). The ECEs in the case study willingly engaged in using formative assessment methods to reflect an authentic portrait of the children's learning and development. The study highlighted how ECEs need time to reflect upon and dialogue with others on their assessment practices, explore the purposes of their assessments, identify effective strategies to communicate with parents, and make sure

they understand how summative and formative assessments work together to give a more complete and comprehensive picture of children's progress.

Assessment Tools and Methods

The extent that early learning programs attend to the assessment of young children's learning and development is discussed in greater detail in this section and focuses on the balanced assessment methods supported in the research literature. The ECEs in the case study reported that an overwhelming amount of information is gained through observation. In preparing for parent conferences for children transitioning to kindergarten, the developmental checklist was used to prioritize or decide what should be documented. The developmental checklist, however, had its limitations as it did not reflect the depth of progress and changes made with all children. As a baseline or benchmark to structure and focus ongoing focused observations, the developmental checklist was identified as holding potential by the ECEs; however, they were observed to be most enlivened when discussing the learning narratives underway.

Bagnato (2007) pointed out that observation and direct interaction with a child to obtain information on their skill development is not innovative; the innovation occurs when the emphasis shifts from a standardized procedure to the provision of multiple opportunities that allow the child to express or demonstrate skills in a variety of context and situations. Carr (2001) asserted that criterion-referenced and deficit-based assessment procedures lack insight into children's thinking and learning, inquiries, and dispositions to learning, which are reflected in a learning story. In the learning story approach, provisions are made for the child and parent to respond and contribute their perspectives on the story deepening the meaning and significance of the child's inquiry. Through this

process, the child's progress is measured against themselves and with articulation of learning dispositions unique to their sociocultural experiences. The development of assessment methods for young children (although rooted in child development with its emphasis on cognitive development) is moving along a continuum striving for holistic measures that include the sociocultural relevance.

The context and methods of assessment most suitable and useful with young children are those that enable the child to reflect their capabilities and metacognition as reflected from multiple perspectives. The social and cultural influences on children's learning and development illuminate the need to broaden assessment to reflect multiple perspectives and understanding of each child's unique experiences. The sociocultural perspective is metaphorically likened to the unpacking of the little suitcases on their backs that allow for a richer portrait of who this person is and how experiences are shaping their learning dispositions and enriching their genetic developmental opportunities. The use of developmental checklists and observations to plan learning experiences are practices linked to developmental behaviorist theories, whereas portfolios, learning stories and documentation that explains learning goals reflect emergent and constructivist approaches. The various theories create confusion and tension for ECEs in their choice of methods, the selection of methods they see accessible to them and understanding of the differing theoretical influences (Curtis & Carter, 2008; Schrio, 2008). From the critical, postmodern theoretical perspectives both in the case study and online questionnaire data, there was little evidence indicating that the role and engagement of children and parents was utilized to reflect multiple perspectives and

reflection of the child's learning and development. (Curtis & Carter, 2008; Rose & Whitty 2010; Whitty, Rose, Baisley, Comeau, & Thompson, 2008).

Professional Learning and Development

This section addresses how ECEs attended to the assessment of young children's learning and development providing a rich layer of the professional learning and development that occurred and promising post diploma options for education and training. In the ECEs' exploration of learning narratives, they indicated they were *taking advantage of time* to conduct observations and document when in the indoor space. The ECEs reported that during outdoor play period, the children had more space for play activities and self-selected into small group or individual play activities more frequently. The outdoor play period provided the ECEs with more opportunities to step back and focus on observations of the children's play explorations. The ECEs' exploration with learning narratives enabled them to make visible the depth of learning children uncover in their play. In exploring how to take better advantage of observation opportunities, ECEs identified that the outdoor play period afforded more time to act as observer or co-researcher than during indoor time frames.

Also within the case study, one ECE was caught in the thinking that if an adult is not teaching, children are not learning, which initially contributed to difficulty in understanding the use of assessment to inform play-based learning experiences. This issue was evident in the implementation of the 45-minute play intervals by the children in groupings decided by the ECEs and assigned to a particular ECE in the environment. The limited time in the space did not provide the children with the breadth and space of time required for children to engage in the level of inquiry-based exploration that provides

space for the ECE to act as facilitator or co-researcher with the children. The focus of planning was to address functional skill development identified from conducting assessments with the developmental checklists combined with efforts to address thematic or topical areas that might be of interest to the children or prompted by play resources on hand. At the onset of the study, the structure of time, space, and grouping of the children fostered a focus on teacher-directed and teacher-initiated activities. These actions were addressed and challenged within the team by the Program Administrator and through further discussion of the ECE team during the focus group debrief when ECE KC proposed a new organizational structure and planning process for the next year.

The study highlighted the importance of balancing child-initiated and adult-directed activities to support assessment practices, as well as the importance of utilizing a variety of methods. When the ECEs in the study were freed to focus observations and engage in collaborative discussions to interpret observation, a greater understanding and thrust toward provisioning for child-initiated activities occurred. As the ECEs invested in focused observations, the collecting of observation data occurred from an *action-on* lens, a greater depth of children's learning and development occurred, serving to more effectively inform teacher-directed activities. During teacher-directed activities informed by *action-on* observations an application of an *action-of* lens enabled assessment of the effectiveness of the activities while the ECE was engaged in the delivery of the activity with the children. Further exploration and development of the dichotomy of *action-on* or *action-of* responsive and reflexive interactions with children could support ECE reflective practices in formulating concepts for dialogue with children, colleagues, and parents and enable a perspective toward uncovering and co-constructing knowledge with children

rather than for them. Boardman (2007) presented the shift in planning and assessment when a sociocultural perspective is taken requiring a shift in thinking to the *learner-in-action*, a concept discussed by Carr (2001). When ECEs document learners-in-action, it shifts the assessment model to one that captures the learning underway rather than measuring what has been learned. Claxton & Carr (2004) proposed that teachers in a learning curriculum explain, orchestrate, comment, and model, which formed the basis of a framework for teaching that enabled the ECE to make explicit what learning dispositions were valued and which to set aside. The meaning making perspectives set the background for ECEs to co-construct learning situations with young children and expand thinking and learning beyond the confines of narrow or restricted bodies of knowledge. The use of authentic assessment practices by ECEs could be strengthened and further developed with support and discussion of the *action-on* or *action-of* dichotomy and deeper analysis in the documentation of children's learning and development using sociocultural theory.

The study engaged ECEs in self-evaluating their assessment practices by providing a professional development experience that fostered new learning and insight on the nature, value, and application of various assessment methods. The ECEs could not recall formal training on the purposes of assessment in their formal diploma training programs or selections of professional development experiences they had accessed since they graduated. The interest indicated by Program Administrators for access to more training further substantiates the gap in training between leaving a diploma program and actual frontline practice. The expectations for assessment of young children from various stakeholders and the selection of assessment methods warrants consideration and

development of new pathways for ECE to access training and resources as their careers develop. This points to a need for providing ECEs with access to post-diploma courses, resources, and support systems provides for greater exploration and development of assessment purposes, and teaching strategies associated with authentic assessment practices (formative assessment methods, dynamic assessment, curriculum embedded, and authentic assessment) further discussed in the recommendations section.

Recommendations

The case study observations, interviews, ECE journals, and debrief focus group provided a rich snapshot of the opportunities and challenges that exist for further development. In order for early learning programs and ECEs to maximize their potential in the assessment of young children's learning and development the following recommendations: (a) models of care and education, (b) parent engagement and involvement, and (c) training and resource development warrant consideration and development. Each of these points is addressed below.

Models of care and education. At the onset of the study, The ECEs were in the beginning stages of working together as a team, each member viewing her role from a different perspective related to her previous training, professional development, and experiences. Subsequent to the study, the program in the EYC has re-structured the space to support mixed-age grouping of children 2to 5years old (prior to kindergarten entry) and created a daily routine structure that allows for greater collaboration among ECEs and children. Further research on models of care and education with young children that employ sociocultural pedagogical approaches, such as looping (where peer grouping of children and ECEs stay together for three years), mixed-age groupings, and action

research practices are warranted to provide structures for the children, parents, and ECE to co-construct knowledge and dialogue about learning and development opportunities and achievements (Gandini, 2011; Nason & Whitty, 2007). The quality of early learning programs will be fostered and strengthened through practices that support ECEs in their dialogue, reflection, and inquiry practices. This process will subsequently strengthen assessment practices and increase the validity of authentic assessment methods employed. A recommendation as a result of the study findings would be to provide supports across the early learning system that will support ECEs to successfully explore and implement research based models of care and education.

Parent engagement and involvement. The involvement and engagement of parents in assessment activities in the case study was centered within the parent-teacher conference to discuss the results of the developmental skills checklist and to share portfolio documentation. The program established a number of family initiatives within the program day and after hours to build relationships between parents and the ECE team. The types of events included strawberry socials, family literacy activities, and sharing in multicultural events. The ECE team also discussed the conversations that may occur during drop-off and pick-up periods if parents had time and ECEs were still present. Displaying documentation of curriculum activities and special events in areas that parent moved through in the space were viewed by some parents. The ECEs in the study expressed the importance of sharing information with parents and disappointment with current communication activities. In the online questionnaire, 78 % ($n=18$) of respondents indicated that sharing information with parents was a significant reason for assessing children's learning and development in their program.

The case study highlighted strategies used in building relationships with parents and communication activities. The online questionnaire corroborates the importance of conducting assessments for the purposes of sharing information with parents with the efforts demonstrated by the ECE team from the Early Years Centre (EYC) in the case study. The movement toward authentic assessment practices in partnership with parents to reflect multiple dimensions of child's knowledge and increase understanding of child's sociocultural experiences warrants the need to develop and explore strategies and processes that support dialogue and collaboration. Markström (2011) demonstrated a means for ECEs to engage and facilitate a dialogue with parents during the parent-teacher conference that moves conversation about the child within a strength-based construct using artifacts they have called strength cards. This idea could be a promising practice utilized with parents of children birth to eight years while offering an inroad to further development of collaborative parent engagement and involvement in assessment activities for all children.

A recommendation as a result of study findings points to the need for Program Administrators and ECE teams to work with parents to develop a set of strategies that supports collaborative communication between parents and ECEs of assessment data in relation to the parent's child. Among the strategies explored could be hosting biweekly or monthly end of day open invitations for parents to explore activities with their children and review projects underway. Establish monthly communication through paper portfolios, and consider the use of electronic portfolios for parents to see immediate updates. Provide support and training to ECEs in the *learning story approach* (Carr, 2000) as an assessment method that also allows space for the child and parent to respond.

Training and resource development. The ECEs and Program Administrator who participated closely in the case study and Program Administrators who participated in the online questionnaire reflected that child assessment was important to them. However they required more training in appropriate assessment methods and processes. This specialized training needs to reflect current theoretical influences. It needs to make that use meaningful and sustainable methods to reflect the child and parent perspectives. High quality assessment training also needs to help ECEs understand the purposes for assessment in the program. A final aspect of proper training is that it needs to provide ECEs access to tools and assessment resources that provide a balanced and authentic reflection of children's learning and development. A recommendation as a result of study findings supports the development of post diploma courses and professional development opportunities to strengthen and foster ECEs skills, knowledge, and practices in the selection and administration of assessment methods most appropriate for young children.

Specialized assessment training would also foster improved assessment practices by ECEs maximizing the opportunity to provide authentic assessment data on young children's learning and development. Providing ECEs with access to training in assessment practices will deepen understanding of the role of summative, standardized assessment practices, and how they are used in monitoring and providing surveillance of children's development. Further exploration of strategies and supports enabling ECEs to dialogue and collaborate on the dimension of their roles or teaching practices that support the co-inquiry and responsive curriculum activities as a means to gather and document within an authentic assessment practice model is warranted.

Limitations

The structure of the study paralleled the researcher's view of balanced assessment processes for young children. There were multiple methods (observation, field notes, interview, journal, debrief focus group) for research participants to demonstrate and reflect their knowledge, application of, and challenges with the assessment of young children's development and learning. The results of the findings from these processes were triangulated and confirmed through summative data collected in the online questionnaire. As in any study, limitations must be addressed to ascertain the validity and reliability of the research conducted. The professional relationship between the researcher and research participants was considered to be one of the strengths in the inquiry. The qualitative accuracy of the research data collected through participant observations, field notes, semi-structured interviews, and educator journals was verified in a number of ways. First, interview transcripts were provided to ECEs and Program Administrator for review and confirmation prior to the debrief focus group. Second, the debrief focus group provided a forum to clarify and confirm ECE and Program Administrator interview transcripts and address topics and quires that had emerged as a result of the study. Finally, ECEs and Program Administrator were provided with Chapter four research findings to review and confirm.

The case study research was conducted with one ECE team and Program Administrator in a pre-kindergarten program. This research reflects their contextualized practices and analysis of assessment and may not be transferable to all pre-kindergarten programs. Although the online questionnaire serves as a triangulation and validation of results with the early learning program, the 36% response rate does not represent the

majority of licensed early learning programs across PEI. Should researchers want to do a similar study in other geographical areas, the online questionnaire is reproducible and transferable.

The types of assessment methods and frequency of assessment are not intended in this study to represent the assessment methods ECEs and programs would employ with children under the age of two years. In fact, the children's perspectives and responses to assessment processes is an area for further research as ECEs move more toward documentation of learning with children. This study did not explore the role of parents in the assessment process nor does it represent the perspective of a broad range of parents in regard to the role parents see for themselves in the assessment process and their impressions of current assessment practices with their children.

Considerations for Future Research

When presented with the topic of authentic assessment practices, 45% ($n=10$) of Program Administrators through the online questionnaire indicated they were exploring how to use this process with 27% ($n=6$) indicating more training was needed. In the online questionnaire developed for this study, authentic practices were defined as “a rich picture of who the child is” and a process that: (a) documents what they are thinking; (b) how they have changed; (c) their learning process and style; (d) ability to communicate through a variety of forms of expression; and (e) how their experiences, thinking, and engagement with the world is impacting them. The keen interest and exploration in the use of authentic assessment practices affords the opportunity for ECEs and early learning programs to demonstrate sociocultural pedagogical approaches through authentic assessment processes and to balance the summative assessment data results of children's

learning and development. This points to a need for further research into authentic assessment methods within early childhood pedagogy and modern theoretical influences.

The Government of Prince Edward Island (PEI) invests in summative assessments of four-year-old children for screening purposes with two assessment tools: (a) *Ages and Stages Questionnaire* (ASQ); and (b) *Early Years Evaluation- Direct Assessment* (EYE-DA). The Ages and Stages questionnaire is administered by Public Health Nursing, Health PEI and completed by parents, and the EYE-DA and EYE-TA is administered by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Services and completed by kindergarten teachers. The implementation of these summative screening processes with preschool children in PEI warrants further research into how assessment information is collected with young children, what decisions are made, and the long term implications to assessment of children's learning and development. The tensions associated with applying standardized processes with young children are connected to children's emotional states during the testing process and the objectivity of the assessors. Epstein, Schweinhart, DeBruin-Parecki, and Robin (2004) proposed several recommendations that guide the development of a balanced approach in preschool assessment where testing, appropriately applied, is one form of assessment that may measure such things as numeracy and literacy and is balanced with authentic forms of assessment.

In moving toward balanced assessment processes that include authentic forms of assessment, New Zealand provides an example from which we can learn in the identification of resources, supports, dialogue, and collaboration. New Zealand has been a forerunner in the move to put childcare services within the ministry of education. They have developed a national curriculum framework with a variety of resources to support

ECEs. They have implemented robust evaluation and regulatory frameworks and increased the educational requirements of ECE to at least three years. Leaders in early childhood education have provided ongoing professional development for ECEs. As well within New Zealand, conducted contemporary research, is constantly promoted. Recently due to economic conditions they have moved to funding and focusing resources to vulnerable children and families. McLachlan (2011) indicated,

Aspects which New Zealand could have improved include a stronger relationship with the other ministries that support children and their families (Social Development and Health), as this would ensure that families are not working with multiple agencies to get support for children; and a commitment to longitudinal research on the outcomes and benefits of the curriculum , as this would provide a stronger evidential base on the outcomes of the approach to early childhood education. (p. 43)

New Zealand's experiences and current directions point to current research opportunities in PEI to reflect how PEI stakeholders from early learning programs, education, public health, and the social service delivery systems are collaborating and enabling the opportunity for integrating formative and summative assessment monitoring processes.

Statistics Canada (2011) reported that the number of children aged four years and under is on the rise across Canada at 11%, with PEI showing an 8.7% increase from 2006 to 2011, the highest increase in the Atlantic region. The number of licensed child care spaces in PEI , as recorded by the Early Childhood Development-Section in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development was 3,099 and includes early years centres (EYCs) (Community Information Coordinator, Email communication

August 29, 2012). Population rates and the number of licensed child care spaces indicate that a significant portion of children under the age of four are involved in licensed group care. This information provides an avenue for Program Administrators and ECEs from the early childhood sector to establish collaborative relationships with colleagues from Public Health and Public Education and explore authentic assessment practices. Further research would serve to conduct a longitudinal study that would develop fair assessment processes with young children through appropriate research informed methods.

Additional research would provide a mechanism to address the training and information needs as identified by research participants and respondents, and contribute to the development and dissemination of sociocultural pedagogy and benefit to young children.

Summary

A portrait of assessment practices by ECEs in early learning programs has been reflected by the research participants from the early learning program through the data collected on the assessment methods practiced, as well as factors that affected their triumphs, insights, and challenges with assessment. Experiences with criterion-referenced assessment to identify developmental or functional skill development was enriched with experiences of exploring the assessment of learning dispositions. Awareness and curiosity to explore assessment methods that enabled authentic assessment were illuminated as reflected in this quote from a research participant *They're kind of their own little resource in themselves, when you get to know them, and help identify what their triggers might be, or what help they need* (CM, June 14, 2011). Depth and dimension of the case study portrait WAS supplemented with the online questionnaire data from program administrators. Through this study, elements of the literature review were

evident such as: (a) the balance between ECE directed and child initiated facilitation of activities; (b) the differing images of the child's capabilities; (c) the tensions experienced from the competing theories (emergent, constructivist, social efficiency, behaviourist); (d) the socially constructed nature of learning and influence on development; (e) emphasis that assessment is a scientific measurement; (f) evidence of formative and authentic assessment practices; and (g) formative assessment methods utilized.

This study provided a snapshot of the practices and methods of assessment utilized by ECEs and processes developed within early learning programs to support assessment. Insight into the training and support needed for ECEs and early learning programs in the implementation of early learning curriculum frameworks based on sociocultural theories and pedagogies was made visible and created a context in which to move forward within the ECE system to address the training and educational needs of ECEs and to support the leadership development of Program Administrators. Study research findings position ECEs as agents in the implementation and utilization of authentic assessment results for young children. While ECE colleagues half a world away in New Zealand are being called to action to protect early childhood education for all children, it is hoped this study will be used to call Prince Edward Island ECEs into action to take their place in the professional community through the utilization of authentic assessment practices with young children.

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Appendix A**Information Letter
Program Administrator/Supervisor and ECEs**

April 1, 2011

Dear (Name of Program Administrator –Supervisor or Early Childhood Educator),

Although you are familiar with me as an Early Childhood Coach in the Bridges Program administered by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, I am writing to you in my role as a Masters student in UPEI's Faculty of Education Leadership in Learning Program. As part of my degree requirements I must complete a research project or thesis. My project is entitled "*Early Learning Assessment Practices*" and is intended to capture the current activities of an early learning program. The new initiatives underway in the early learning sector such as the advent of an early learning curriculum framework for children ages birth to 4-year-olds in Prince Edward Island and the EYE-DA universal assessment of 4 -year-old children, provides an opportunity to document current practices and contributions of early learning programs and early childhood educators.

I am writing to ask you to participate and contribute to research about the practices of Early Childhood Educators and early learning programs in young children's early learning and development in Prince Edward Island. Your participation would allow me access to conduct two observations for a four hour period in your program of ECE staff and children ages two year to four years old, to collect samples of any planning, assessment tools used and to conduct an interviews. I expect the observation periods and interview and verification of the interview and observation data will reflect a 10 hour

time commitment (2 hours away from your work with the children or program) I will conduct 60 minute-long audio-taped one-on-one interview in April, 2011 and conduct another 60 minute-long follow-up interview to verify the interview and observation information in May, 2011. Specific interview locations and times will be negotiated to satisfy your convenience. Your participation in this research study is entirely voluntary, and you may stop your participation at any time without penalty or prejudice. I will also be submitting a request to the Child Care Facilities Board of PEI to have your participation recognized as 10 hours of on going professional development as part of your Child Care Facilities Board certificate documentation. The final report of this research study will be used to defend my thesis which is a requirement of the Master's of Education Program. This event is open to the public and you are invited to attend. Participants will also receive a short summary of the findings from the final report.

For participants wishing to remain anonymous you will be identified by a fake name of your choice in the final report. For participants wishing to self-identify you will be identified by your first name in the final report. Further discussion of this option will occur at the outset of your initial interview with me. References to the children and their families or others by participants will be blurred to protect their anonymity as well. Only my research advisors, Drs. Ray Doiron and Tess Miller, and I will have access to the data resulting from this research study. All data resulting from this research study will be retained at least three years after the study at which time all data will be destroyed. However, the audio recording will be destroyed immediately after data analysis is complete and the transcription has been reviewed and accepted by the participant. The final report will include emerging themes, practices and methods in the assessment of

young children's learning and development, quotes from participants reflecting your views, opinions, and stories and recommendations for training, information or resources to support ECEs and programs in your assessment practices.

As part of the legal requirements, you should also be aware that under the "duty to disclose" law, I am obligated to report any disclosure of abuse or neglect of a child in need of protection should such a disclosure occur during the research study.

I sincerely hope you will consider participating in this research study if you have any questions, please contact me at (902) 569-4379 or by email at bgoodine@upei.ca. You may also direct questions about the project to either of my researcher advisors at UPEI's Faculty of Education, Dr. Ray Doiron or Dr. Tess Miller. Dr. Doiron may be reached by e-mail at rdoiron@upei.ca and Dr. Miller may be reached by e-mail at tmiller@upei.ca. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this study, please contact Lynn McPhee of the UPEI Research Ethics Board at (902) 566-0637 or by email at lmacphee@upei.ca.

Sincerely,

Brenda R. Goodine

Appendix B
Program Administrator-Supervisor Program Participation Consent Form

Early Learning Assessment Practices

I, (Program Administrator-Supervisor Name) from (Early Years Centre Name) give consent that Brenda R. Goodine may complete observations, collect samples of planning and assessment tools and conduct interviews with myself and ECE staff as part of data collection for the research study “ *Early Learning Assessment Practices*”

- I understand that I will require time to participate in two 60 minute interviews.
- I understand that ECE staff will require time to participate in two 60 minute interviews.
- I understand that Brenda will conduct a total of four observations for four hour periods with two ECE staff.
- I understand I have the freedom to withdraw at any time and /or not answer any question.
- I understand that the ECE staff participating has the freedom to withdraw at any time and /or not answer any question.
- I understand that the children will not be directly involved nor will their routine be changed.
- I understand that parents will be informed about the study through an informational letter I will distribute to parents.

- I understand that any information from the data collection/ observations will be kept confidential (within the limits of the law). After the study is complete, written results will be summarized and the findings will be presented to (Centre Name), parents, and other early childhood educators via research reports and conferences.

Anonymity (secrecy of who participated) cannot be guaranteed in photo data, so upon further consent to use photo, I understand the risk that participation would no longer be confidential.

- I understand I can keep a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
- I understand that if I have any questions I can contact Brenda R. Goodine at 902-569-4379(home) or email bgoodine@upei.ca or research advisors Dr. Ray Doiron 902-566-0694 or by e-mail at raydorion@upei.ca or Dr. Tess Miller at 902-620-5072 or by e-mail at tsmiller@upei.ca I can also contact the UPEI Research Ethics Board at (902)-566-0637, or by email at lmacphee@upei.ca if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this study.
- I have read the information provided to me about this research study and understand the requirements, purpose of the study, potential benefits and risks associated with participating in this study.
- I affirm consent to the participation of (Centre Name) in this study by signing below.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____ Centre Name: _____

Address: _____

Appendix C
**Informed Consent for Interviews with Program Administrator—Supervisor and
ECE Participants**

Date: (Participant inserts date)

I, (Participant inserts printed name here), volunteer to participate in the research project “*Early Learning Assessment Practices* in Prince Edward Island. I understand the project's purpose is to explore and capture current activities and my practice as an Early Childhood Educator at (Early Years Centre name). I received the information letter sent to potential participants. I understand my research role and the potential benefit for increasing awareness of Early Learning Programs and Early Childhood Educators assessment practices to provide a perspective of current practices. I understand that minimal emotional risk may result from participating in this or any research. I have been encouraged to ask questions throughout the research process. (Participant inserts initials and date here)

I, (Participant inserts printed name here), consent to being audio-taped during two 60 minute -long one-on-one interviews with Brenda R. Goodine , University of Prince Edward Island's (UPEI) Masters of Education student. Interview times, dates and locations will be negotiated to satisfy my convenience. I understand the purpose of the second interview is to review accuracy of transcripts and data collected during the first

interview and observations conducted. I may choose to receive a copy of my interview transcripts. Only Brenda R. Goodine, Drs. Ray Doiron and Tess Miller of UPEI's Faculty of Education have access to data resulting from my research participation. I understand research data will be securely maintained for the three year period following project completion and all data will be destroyed at that time. I consent to use of quotations from my interviews in the research write-up. I will receive a short summary of the findings from the finished thesis. (Participant inserts initials and date here)

I, (Participant inserts printed name here), have reviewed with the researcher, Brenda R. Goodine, options of identity disclosure and anonymity pertaining to my research participation. I understand that the information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. I freely choose to allow the researcher to: identity disclose () retain anonymity (). I may change this choice at any time throughout the research process. My earlier consent to the use of interview quotations will reflect this disclosure/anonymity selection. (Participant inserts initials and date here)

I possess complete contact information for Brenda R. Goodine, Drs. Ray Doiron and Tess Miller, and UPEI's Research Ethics Board. I have the freedom to withdraw at any time for any reason. I have the freedom to not answer any question. (Participant inserts signature and date here)

To be signed by researcher:

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers.

I believe that the participant understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study, and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study

(Researcher inserts signature here)

(Researcher dates document here)

(Brenda R. Goodine, M. Ed. Student Phone: (902) 569-4379 email: bgoodine@upei.ca)

Appendix D
Early Years Centre Research Study Advisory Notice for Parents
Early Learning Assessment Practices
Research Project

Parents:

This is to advise you that (Centre name) is participating in a research project “*Early Learning Assessment Practices*” being conducted by Brenda R. Goodine. Brenda is a Masters student in UPEI’s Faculty of Education Leadership in Learning Program. As part of degree requirements she must complete a research project or thesis. She will be exploring and capturing the current assessment activities of the program. The children will not be directly involved nor will their routine be changed. The final report of this research study will be used by Brenda to defend her thesis which is a requirement of the Master’s of Education Program. Brenda will provide (Centre name) with a short summary of the findings from the final report.

If you have any questions about this research project Brenda can be reached at (902) 569-4379(home) or by e-mail at bgoodine@upei.ca. Brenda’s research advisors at the Faculty of Education are Dr. Ray Doiron and Dr. Tess Miller. Dr. Doiron may be reached at 902-566-0694 or by e-mail at raydoiron@upei.ca and Dr. Miller may be reached at 902-620-5072 or by e-mail at tsmiller@upei.ca.

Please contact the UPEI Research Ethics Board at 902-566-0637 or by e-mail at lmacphee@upei.ca if you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this study.

Sincerely,

Brenda R. Goodine

Appendix E
Parent Consent & Permission to use children's artifacts

I, _____ consent () do not consent() on behalf of my child _____ to have photos taken during the observations being conducted of assessment activities my child may experience with (Early Childhood Educators name).

- I have read the information letter that was sent home and I understand the purpose of the study.
- I understand that any information from the data collection/ observations will be kept confidential (within the limits of the law). After the study is complete, written results will be summarized and the findings will be presented to (Program Name), parents, and other early childhood educators via research reports and conferences.

Anonymity (secrecy of who participated) cannot be guaranteed in photo data, so upon further consent to use photo, I understand the risk that participation would no longer be confidential.

- I understand I can keep a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
- I understand that if I have any questions I can contact Brenda R. Goodine at 902-569-4379 (home) or email bgoodine@upei.ca or research advisors Dr. Ray Doiron 902-566-0694 or by e-mail at raydorion@upei.ca or Dr. Tess Miller at 902-620-5072 or by e-mail at tsmiller@upei.ca I can also contact the UPEI Research Ethics Board at (902)-566-0637, or by email at lmacphee@upei.ca if I have any concerns about the

ethical conduct of this study.

- I have read the information provided to me about this research study and understand the requirements, purpose of the study, potential benefits and risks associated with participating in this study.
- I consent to use of my child's artifacts in this study by signing below.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Appendix F
Program Administrator-Supervisor Consent Form and Online Questionnaire

October 17, 2011

Dear Program Administrator-Director,

My name is Brenda Goodine and I am a Masters student in UPEI's Faculty of Education Leadership in Learning Program. As part of my degree requirements, I must complete a research project or thesis. My project is entitled "**Early Learning Assessment Practices.**" I will be exploring assessment activities used by early learning programs.

As part of my research activities, I would like to capture the perspectives of all programs (early year's centres and private) through this on-line questionnaire. The on-line questionnaire should take a maximum of 20 minutes to complete. This research will provide a current PEI perspective of early learning assessment practices and make recommendations on resources, information, and training. Participation in this research project is completely confidential and voluntary. Choosing not to participate will not result in any adverse consequences. Further, you may refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the on-line questionnaire at any time you choose, without reason, consequence, or guilt.

The final report of this research study will be used to defend my thesis which is a requirement of the Masters of Education Program. Project findings will also be shared through a future professional development event of the Early Childhood Development Association of PEI and through the Centre for Education (CER) website at the University of Prince Edward Island

At no time will names or personal information about participants or the centres where they work be used or published. All information will be kept strictly confidential. By completing the on-line questionnaire, you will be giving consent to participate in this study.

If you have any questions about this research project I can be reached at (902) 569-4379(home) or by e-mail at bgoodine@upei.ca. My project advisors at the Faculty of Education are Dr. Ray Doiron or Dr. Tess Miller. Dr. Doiron may be reached at 902-566-0694 or by e-mail at raydoiron@upei.ca and Dr. Miller may be reached at 902-620-5072 or by e-mail at tsmiller@upei.ca. Please contact the UPEI Research Ethics

Board at 902-566-0637 or by e-mail at lmacphee@upei.ca if you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this study.

You will find the questionnaire at <http://app.fluidsurveys.com/surveys/brg/early-learning-assessment/>

Thank you in advance for participating in this study to further understanding of early learning assessment practices.

Sincerely,
Brenda R. Goodine

Early Learning Assessment Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to complete the questionnaire! Please read each question carefully and indicate your response by clicking on the answer/descriptor that best matches your response. At the end of the questionnaire press the SUBMIT button to submit your responses.

Question 1

Identify your role/position in the early learning and child care program.

- ☐ Program Administrator
- ☐ Director/Supervisor
- ☐ Owner
- ☐ Other Please identify _____

Question 2

Identify your programs auspice/status. Check all that apply.

- ☐ Early Years Centre as designated by provincial government
- ☐ Non-Profit
- ☐ Private

Question 3

What aspects of children's learning and development are assessed in your program? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Developmental domains
- ☐ Learning dispositions
- ☐ Development and Learning Dispositions
- ☐ No assessment is conducted.

Question 4

Reflect on the following case scenario and identify what assessments you or your staff would make for the situation. It has been raining for several days and the children have not been able to play outside. The afternoon play is loud, and the children are full of energy as they explore the different learning areas. The three Early childhood educators are busy adding materials to the environment to sustain the children's interests and mediating interactions. Two boys (three and four years old) have noticed the rain outside and want a better look. They stack two stools on top of each other and are climbing up just as you notice what they are doing. How do you assess this situation and react? Check the statement that would most apply to you and/or your staff.

- ☐ I see the safety concern first and address it and then consider they have taken responsibility to address their interest.
- ☐ I note they are taking an interest in the rain outside and that they have used persistence and problem solving skills to gain access to the windows. I consider how the ECE team and I can give them access to explore the rain outside.
- ☐ I see the safety issue and have the boys stand on one stool explaining my concerns about them falling with the two stools stacked.

Question 5

In your opinion, how significant are each of the following reasons for assessing children's development and learning in your program? Using the following scale to rate your response where 1 is: What I (we) have to do and 5 is: What is most meaningful to do

	1 What I (we) feel we have to do	2	3	4	5 What I (we) feel is most meaningful to do
accountability- proof for others	<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
planning curriculum activities	<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
documenting activities	<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

documenting transition to kindergarten	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
sharing information with parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
sharing information with other professionals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Question 6

As you review the developmental domains listed rate the frequency it is documented by Early childhood educators in your program. 1 (Only when we are concerned about a child)2 (Assess but not as often as I would like)3 (Assessed at least 2 times per year)4 (Assessed monthly)5 (Assessed at least once a week)6 (Not assessed at this time)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Cognitive domain (thinking & language).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cognitive domain (thinking & numeracy)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical domain (Gross motor)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical domain (Fine motor)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emotional Domain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social Domain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Spiritual /Moral Domain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creative Domain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Question 7

Formative assessment processes are used by Early childhood educators to document and record children's learning development. Rate each assessment process with the statement that best describes the practices in your program.1 (More information and training is needed to use this process)2 (We are exploring how to use this process)3 (We are comfortable using this process)4 (We are able to mentor others in how to use this process)5 (We have no interest in this process)

	1	2	3	4	5
Interpreting observations of children's development through play :Using observation to identifying child's developmental levels and play interests	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Authentic assessment practices where a rich picture of who the child is that documents what they are thinking, how they have changed, their learning process and style , ability to communicate through a variety of forms of expression, and how their experiences , thinking, and engagement with the world is impacting them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning story assessments are a narrative approach used to document the complexity of children's learning that reflects learning outcomes and dispositions. Learning story construction follows the following format describing, documenting, discussing and deciding among the ECE team, parents and child as the narrative is written and interpreted.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Portfolio documentation and rubric assessment: A collection of evidence that documents the child's development and learning. A portfolio contains samples of the child's work, ECE observations about the child organized by predetermined objectives, factual, non-judgemental observations of observed activities, a checklist or inventory of skills and development, rating scales that identify traits or behaviours, and interviews with the child and their family that identify the child's abilities and enhance the parent –ECE relationship.	<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Question 8

Reflect on the following case scenario and identify what assessments you or your staff would make for the situation. Ryan is an active high energy 4.5 year old who likes to be on the move.

Outdoor play time is a favourite time in his day. He loves digging in the sand and driving the dump truck around the yard to dump a load of sand. On this day he is taking his sand to the cement pad an area that the ECE team has decided needs to be kept clean for wheel toys and bouncing balls. Ryan is asked to move the piles of sand back to the sand area; he obliges without argument and starts to carry the sand one scoop at a time. After three trips he reconsiders and looks around the yard for a pail that will hold more sand, which he fills and removes the

remaining sand. Then he returns to the sand area to play with the dump truck once more. How would you interpret this observation? Check the statement that would most apply to you and/or your staff.

- ☐ I note Ryan's interest in moving the sand from one place to another.
- ☐ I document his problem solving skills to secure a pail that will hold more sand than the scoop and willingness to respect the limit.
- ☐ I consider Ryan's persistence in solving a difficulty or uncertainty.
- ☐ I acknowledge Ryan has taken responsibility to remove the sand and still maintain his interest. I problem solve with him acceptable locations to move the sand between and thank him for his cooperation.

Question 9

What types of assessment tools do you use to monitor children's development and learning? For each tool answer using the following rating scale. 1 (Do not use) 2 (Do not have) 3 (Have not been trained to use it) 4 (Do not use because it is not well developed) 5 (Use when concerned about a child's development) 6 (Use all of the time)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Developmental Checklists	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Observations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Rubric Assessments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Portfolio resource	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parent feedback	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Narrative progress reports	<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Question 10

What supports are provided to Early Childhood Educators in your program that facilitate assessment of children's learning and development? Identify the frequency that the support is provided with 1 (Never) 2 (About twice a year) 3 (Once a month) 4 (Every other week most of the time) 5 (Weekly most of the time)

	1	2	3	4	5
Team teaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information Technology such as digital video ,camera, computer, or internet access	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dedicated paid time away from responsibilities with children to interpret and document	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Question 11

Do you have any recommendations for decision makers and leaders in the early childhood sector in relation to early learning assessment practices with young children?

None

Question 12

Identify your highest level of certification.

- ☐ Early Childhood Education Certificate
- ☐ Early Childhood Diploma
- ☐ Early Childhood Degree
- ☐ Child & Family Studies degree
- ☐ Social Sciences Degree
- ☐ Human Services Counsellor plus ECE certification
- ☐ Bachelor Applied Arts in Child & Youth Study
- ☐ Master Degree Please identify _____

Question 13

Lastly, identify your years of service at the Program Administration/ Director/Supervisor level.

- ☐ Less than 2 years
- ☐ 2- 5 years
- ☐ 5-10 years
- ☐ 11-15 years
- ☐ 16-20 years
- ☐ 21 years or more

Thank You for taking time to complete this questionnaire! Remember to press the SUBMIT button to record your responses.

Appendix G

Participant Observation Framework

The Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators identifies in Section A: Child Development, Learning and Care. Task A.1 – Facilitate the development and behaviour of children will be used as a guide to collect observation data during participant observations conducted (two observations periods for a 4 hour period will be conducted)

Context Statement:

Early Childhood Educators facilitate daily experiences that support and promote each child’s physical, language, emotional, cognitive, social and creative development and behaviour using applicable observation tools while respecting inclusion principles and diversity issues. (p.11)

A.1.1 Use a Variety of Observation and Documentation Techniques	
Required Skills and abilities	Observation Notes
Document observations using a range of methods (e.g., notes, photos, videos)	

Seek information from parents' observations of their children	
Categorize observations into developmental domains	
Interpret observations	
Communicate observations with team and families	
Use non-biased language (e.g. open-ended sentences, non –judgemental terminology	
Required core knowledge	
Child development theories	
Effective communication skills to understand and interpret children's behaviours	
Theories and approaches about observation and documentation techniques	
A.1.2	
Facilitate Cognitive Development of Children	
Required Skills and abilities	Observation Notes
Assess and interpret developmental stage of children	

Observe children's play and interactions	
Interpret observations	
Identify strategies to further promote cognitive development	
Gather information about the child's cognitive development from team members, family and relevant others	
Required core knowledge	
Cognitive development related to age of the children	
Multiple intelligences	
Program and quality standards regarding observation techniques and cognitive development	
Communication skills to obtain information about the child	
Resources in the environment (e.g., colleagues, materials, students)	
A.1.3	
Facilitate Language Development of Children	
Required Skills and abilities	Observation Notes

Observe and interpret language development during play and interactions	
Communicate with the child (e.g., non-verbal techniques, home language(s))	
Determine language(s) spoken at home	
Determine language ability according to age and stage of development	
Identify factors affecting capacity (e.g., environmental, intellectual, cultural, physiological)	
Identify beliefs and practices that affect language use and development	
Required core knowledge	
Language development for second language learners	
Child development theories	
Language development theories according to developmental stages and ages	
Developmental practices for promoting and supporting language development	
Resources in the environment (e.g., colleagues, materials, students)	
Multiple intelligences	

Program and quality standards regarding observation techniques and language development	
Cultural diversity theories and approaches	
A.1.4	
Facilitate Social Development of Children	
Required Skills and abilities	Observation Notes
<p>Observe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The child's interactions with peers & adults · The child when they are being dropped off and picked up · The child's stage of social play · The child's interaction with their environment · The child's body language, gestures and facial expressions · The child's peer entry group skills · How the child manages transition times in the program 	
Identify triggers that may impact on the child's social behaviour (e.g. transitions)	
Facilitate children's problem solving skills	
Facilitate children's entry skills	
Required core knowledge	
Child development theories	
Child social development theories	

Multiple intelligences	
Diversity theories and approaches	
Program and quality standards regarding observation techniques and social development	
The child's family and extended network of support	
Resources in the environment (e.g. colleagues, materials, students)	
A.1.5	
Facilitate Acceptance of Diversity	
Required Skills and abilities	Observation Notes
Model a positive attitude toward diversity (e.g., family, cultural, special needs)	
Provide materials and activities that reflect diversity	
Check and validate perceptions (e.g., why a child does not look an adult in the eye)	
Promote positive attitudes towards differences	
Utilize different communication methods	
Required core knowledge	

Differing socioeconomic and cultural realities within the program	
Immigrant adjustment process	
Concepts of discrimination, prejudice, homophobia, racism, etc.	
A.1.6	
Facilitate Emotional Development of Children	
Required Skills and abilities	Observation Notes
<p>Observe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The child's interactions at drop-off and pick-up · The child's interactions with family members · The child during play with other children and adults 	

<p>Assess and interpret:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · How the child relates to others · The child's self-esteem and autonomy, self-concept and self-identity · The child's level of comfort or security · The child's problem solving strategies · How the child manages stress and conflict · How transition times affect the child · How the child plays within their environment · If the child displays developmentally appropriate empathy · The child's self-regulation skills 	
<p>Implement strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Set goals · Review · Evaluate and reflect · 	
Required core knowledge	
Child development theories	
Child temperament theories	
Attachment theories	
Multiple intelligences	
Self-regulation skills development theories	
Program and quality standards regarding observation techniques and emotional development	

Planning processes and theories	
Resources in the environment (e.g., colleagues, materials, students)	
A.1.7	
Facilitate Creative Development of Children	
Required Skills and abilities	Observation Notes
Facilitate children in the planning and follow-through of activities	
Structure the environment and activities around creative learning	
Provide open-ended activities with varied stimulating materials	
Facilitate children's problem-solving skills	
Set up environment to promote creative development	
Provide activities that enable the children to express their creativity	
Demonstrate creativity, spontaneity and flexibility	
Required core knowledge	

Resources in the environment (e.g., colleagues, materials, students)	
Active learning principles (e.g. key experiences)	
Multiple intelligences	
Multiple teaching strategies	
Program and quality standards regarding observation techniques and cognitive development	
A.1.8	
Facilitate Physical Development of Children	
Required Skills and abilities	Observation Notes
Observe and interpret: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The child's gross motor skills · The child's fine motor skills · How the child interacts with peers 	
Identify if the child may have physical challenges or disabilities	
Identify individual circumstances that could affect physical development (e.g., premature birth)	

Implement strategies:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Set goals · Review · Evaluate and reflect 	
Required core knowledge	
Child development theories	
Multiple intelligences	
Each child and their individual circumstances	
Program and quality standards regarding observation techniques and cognitive development	
Resources in the environment (e.g., colleagues, materials, students)	
A.2.3	
Develop Infant Program	
Required Skills and abilities	Observation Notes
Develop a program based on:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Observations · Developmental needs of children · Interests of children · Community resources 	
Set up a physical environment that supports the child's learning and development	

Find resources and materials based on the child's interests and needs	
Set up a safe physical environment for activities	
Develop a written plan that includes activities	
Collaborate with parents in developing individual infant program plans	
Respect and respond to parents' expectations for their child	
Create an emotional bond with the child based on social and emotional needs	
Post the plan and review ongoing progress	
Exchange information and share observations daily on the infant's experiences (e.g., eating, sleeping, milestones, play)	
Required core knowledge	
Child development theories	
Individual children and their families	
Variety of diverse family compositions	
Developmentally-enriched activities to develop skills	

Attachment theories	
Temperament theories	
Related regulations, standards of practice, quality standards and licensing requirements	
Organizational values, policies and procedures	
Development of infant programs	
Principles of establishing a developmentally-appropriate-environment	
A.2.4	
Develop Toddler Program	
Required Skills and abilities	Observation Notes
Develop a program based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Observations · Developmental needs of children · Interests of children · Community resources 	
Set up a physical environment that supports the child's learning and development	
Find resources and materials based on children's interests and needs	
Respect and respond to parent's expectations for their child	

Follow a continuum of development to enrich skills and abilities	
Offer a variety of activities and allow for revisiting	
Create an emotional bond with the child based on social and emotional needs	
Document and share program plan or make learning visible through a variety of means	
Involve parents in developing program plan	
Set up a safe physical environment for activities	
Provide parents with updates on their child's progress and development	
Support each child's full participation	
Required core knowledge	
Child development theories	
Individual children and their families	
Related regulations, standards of practice, quality standards and licensing requirements	
Organizational values, policies and procedures	

Reference:

Child Care Human Resource Sector Council (2010). *Occupational standards*

Appendix H
Program Administrator and Early Childhood Educator Semi-Structured Interview

Early Learning Assessment Practices

Interview Guide and Script: This is a conversation. The questions we have here will help guide this conversation. I encourage you to ask me questions, too. Feel free to share specific stories as we talk our way through this conversation. Should you at any time during the conversation wish to not answer a question, end the conversation or prefer the audio-tape be turned off please let me know. Are we ready?

- 1) Tell me about your professional background, years of service in the early childhood sector and any specific training you have completed in assessment of young children's learning and development.

- 2) Describe your early learning setting. (Community, size, social economic situations, diversity, neighbourhood, resources, supports). Discuss how each influences young children's development and learning.

- 3) How many children are in your group? () Male () Female () Total

What is the age range in your group?

() Infants	() less than 12 months	() 12-18 months	() 18 -24 months
() Toddlers	() 24- 30 months	() 30-34 months	

() 3 yr. olds			
() 4 yr. olds			

- 4) What are some of the developmental needs and characteristics you see displayed by the children in your group? (physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and linguistic)

What sources are available to you to gain more information about individual children?

What do you do when you are concerned about a child's development?

How do you use this information in planning curriculum activities?

- 5) How many of the children are in the following language categories? How does language proficiency impact the children and their experience in your group?

() English language proficient	
() Limited English proficient	
() Bilingual –English and Francophone	
() Other:	

- 6) How many students have the following special needs? How does this affect your planning for the group?

<input type="checkbox"/> Blind or visually impaired	<input type="checkbox"/> Gifted
<input type="checkbox"/> Deaf or hearing impaired	<input type="checkbox"/> Physically disabled
<input type="checkbox"/> Developmental disabled	<input type="checkbox"/> Emotionally or behaviourally disabled
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

7) What racial/ethnic groups are represented in the group?

Aboriginal	American	European-Russia
Canadian European	South America	Middle East
Canadian Francophone	Middle East	Asian
Other	Other	African

How do you become familiar with what the children already know, in terms of both skills and the cultural resources they bring to the classroom?

8) How do you keep track of the children's learning and development?

Are observations regularly conducted? How often? When? How is children's progress (learning and development) documented? Are there particular resources that support you? Are there barriers you encounter in documenting children's progress?

9) Tell me about your observation and assessment practices with the children.

Daily communication (e.g. eating, sleeping, play activities) When do you conduct observations? Why do you conduct observations? Are there resources you use to guide your observations? What do you do with your observation results?

10) How and for what reason(s) do you communicate with parents or guardians? Why is it important to involve families in the education of their children? What approaches do you use to involve families? What other approaches are there to involve parents?

11) How do your classroom routines, procedures, and activities support children's health and respect for their culture and individuality, promote positive development, and challenge children to gain new competencies? What are the most important classroom routines, procedures or activities in your class?

12) What content standards, assessments or initiatives influence how you organize the curriculum for your group of children? Do you use environment scales (ITERS/ECERS) to support planning? Developmental checklists? Developmentally Appropriate Practice guidelines? ECE Occupational standards? A particular curriculum approach (Creative, HighScope, Montessori, Reggio Emilia Inspired, NB Early Learning, etc) Project Approach learning experiences

13) Describe any specific research-based best teaching practices you use?

Developmentally Appropriate Practice, Vygotsky's theory- Zone Proximal

Development, Scaffolding, Dynamic assessment.